

*5<sup>th</sup> Year Senior*

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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## Acknowledgements

I would first off like to thank and acknowledge all those people, places, and events that took place which allowed me to write this story. I couldn't have done it without the inspiration of the great game of football or without the people directly associated with me through it. My family has always been the backbone of my support and it has carried over with the support of my fiancée Jaime as well. To my mom, dad, brother, old high school friends and teammates, current teammates, and coaches, I thank you too because you are the ones who made this possible for me. My story isn't that interesting in and of itself. It's what has been added to my life that has given it some meaning regardless of how small. Finally, I would like to recognize Dr. Mat Fisher for not only his involvement with me throughout this project, but also for his dedication to my academic experience at Ball State University.

## Preface

Many pieces have been written detailing the ins and outs of a college football team, but none have ever been written from a perspective that will encompass much more than just the horrors of two-a-days, the drudgery of meetings, and the glory of Saturdays. None have ever detailed the actual off-field lives of the young men who sweat and bleed for the glory of their respective institutions. Much more happens than just winning and losing and the preparation that takes place before those outcomes. Furthermore, one would think that a book about college football would only be interesting if it detailed a storied program such as Notre Dame or Oklahoma. True, those programs may command national respect and intrigue, but are the lives of the individuals who play on a smaller scale any less respectable and intriguing in their own right? The Ball State Cardinals may not be on the college football map, but the men who wear the red and white carry with them the same emotions and same desire as those who wear the maize and blue in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Written from within and encompassing aspects of life that supersede those of college football, this is a story that must be told.

There are many years that have gone by up to this point, twenty-two and a half to be exact. Also, many years are still to come. But in one's life, there are time frames when the decisions he or she makes determine much of the rest of what happens in life. It's hard to say when these times will come, but for me, the prospect for the next six months of my life create feelings inside of me that cause me to believe that this is one of those time frames. I must tell you that I am not writing this story after the fact but rather in the present. I will only use a few memories from the past to create settings, characters, and emotional states, but the things that occur will be real. Furthermore, this will not be a simple autobiographical account of where I have been and where I am going, but rather a journey, which many people could put themselves into because the issues that I face are not necessarily unlike those that everyone else faces every day. I, as a writer, a college student, and a football player am not in anyway different than the man down the street. The relationships made and lost, the friendships forged, the battles won and lost, and the lessons learned shape who we are and what we do regardless of where we are at in our

particular lives. These are the reasons why I have chosen to write about *this time* in my life because never before have so many things been staring me in the face and deserving of my attention.

Every story needs a beginning, middle, and end. It needs characters, drama, action, emotion, and humor. No one wants to hear a story that has no penultimate climax or one that lacks a purpose. This is why it is difficult to tell personal stories that some may find to have no intricate plot or be simply part of life. Life itself is a story and telling its tale may be the hardest thing of all to do.

## Chapter One

“My career is over.” These were the only words I could think when I felt and heard the popping and twisting of my left knee on that steamy Friday morning in August. The pain shot through my body the instant two players fell into the outside of my left leg and causing the knee to buckle all the while I was being block on the right shoulder by a 300 pound offensive lineman. The body is not made to be folded in such manners with such force. I tried to get to my feet but couldn’t get the knee to respond. Not wanting to lie on the field I crawled to the sideline, buried my facemask into the ground, and began to wonder how bad it was. Auburn was only fifteen days away.

“The good news is, I feel a solid endpoint on your ACL so it is not torn, but you do have a second-degree sprain of your MCL.” These were the words of the team physician just one hour after the injury occurred. As I sat in the doctor’s office, ankles taped and still wearing my sweat-drenched undershirt, he delivered the news. All I could think about was Auburn.

“How ‘bout Auburn? Do I have a chance?”

“It’s all a matter how quickly the knee heals and how much stability you have in it.”

“I’m a fast healer. I’ll be ready.”

“Let’s hope so.”

I am familiar with this injury. I had sprained the MCL in my right knee twice in the previous five years, and because it was early in my career I had previous knowledge of the type of rehabilitation it would take and the time frame which I had to work with. When I hurt my right knee, I believe it took right around two weeks for me to be ready to play again. Two weeks, in this case wouldn’t be soon enough. I had to speed up the healing process.

It’s Monday morning, less than four days after I had hurt the knee and I am just finishing fifteen minutes on the treadmill, running a seven-minute mile pace the last half of the run. The next day I walk back out onto the field for the first time and go through some functional drills as a step toward getting back on the field. Everything is going

great. I'm planning on being on the field for the end of camp scrimmage that Saturday. Then, as I'm finishing my routine outside, the trainer putting me through the drills says, "You're looking great, especially considering this is a four to six week injury."

"Four to six weeks? You got to be kidding? Nobody has said this to me before."

"That's going by the book, but of course, healing can be accelerated."

Anger and frustration coursed through my veins. It was not that I didn't understand the severity of my injury, but just that no one had said this to me before. I asked the head trainer about it and he said that what the assistant had said was true, but that I was already doing things that I should not have been doing so we still had an outside shot at Auburn. The next thing I needed to know was when I would need to practice again in order to go on the trip.

The NCAA regulates the number of players who are allowed to go on road trips, 60 to be exact, so it is imperative that the players who travel must be able to perform on the field. Players, regardless of age, seniority, or ability do not travel if they are unable to play. Also, players who are unable to practice in the time leading up to the game usually do not go either because they either aren't able to grasp the new schemes going in or haven't proven themselves fit to play. These types of questions can't be answered by a trainer or doctor though, so the Friday, one week after my injury and eight days before Auburn, I confronted Coach Lynch in the new weight room.

"When do I need to practice in order to play?" I had to ask because I wasn't sure if I'd be ready by Tuesday's practice, but I thought for sure that Thursday or Friday was a possibility.

"I'm keeping a spot open for you, Allen. So if you can physically go, you'll go."

"Alright."

That's all I needed to hear. As I headed back to the locker room, my confidence grew and I couldn't keep from smiling. Looking around at the other guys who were busting ass out in the sun made me want to be part of it again. Fall camp is the time to grow tough with one another and I was missing most of it. The time spent sweating and bleeding under the mid-afternoon sun is time that most people don't or cannot understand. Each player and each coach knows about it. They know how difficult it is to stay focused during film sessions off the field and drill segments on it that seem to last

for hours instead of minutes. We all do it willingly. Almost to a man, if someone asked us if we'd be out there if we had a ride or not, I believe most would answer "yes." If someone were to ask the coaching staff what was more important, the game or the paycheck, I feel confident in saying the game. The special thing is, this is the same across America. It's not just at your Florida States or Michigans. It's at all the institutions around the country and especially those which don't provide scholarships, where kids are only playing for the love of it all. Just because there's no scholarships doesn't mean there's no fall camp; and, just because there are scholarships doesn't mean special treatment for certain players. Under that August sun, everyone is the same. We are all hurt, we are all sore, and we are all tired; yet, we endure. Why? "Why?" indeed. That's why I needed to be out there on the field instead of in the training room so that I could endure with my teammates, those other guys who would be the ones making the plays to beat Auburn and Kentucky. Still even though I wasn't out there with them, I think they understood the determination in my eyes because more than one asked me, "You going to be ready?" All I could do was nod my head and smile. My mind and heart kept telling me that I would be on that plane for Auburn. I just knew my body would respond to the positive feelings that I had. I really did not want to face the reality of the situation.

The Monday of game week, I went back out on to the field for some sprint work. Up until that point, I had been doing more jogging and running, but I needed to be able to sprint if I was going to have any chance of going. After several minutes of cross-field sprint work, our head trainer Neal Hazen came over and watched. I stopped to talk to him.

"Allen, you're looking great considering how serious your injury was. You're still planning on going to see Dr. Matchette tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah."

"Listen, you know he has to clear you to play, and I know how badly you want to be there this Saturday, but you have to be realistic about this thing. It's one thing to be positive and tough, but another to be realistic. You just can't expect to come back from a second-degree knee sprain in less than two weeks."

"Yeah, I know. I just didn't want to think about it like that."

"I know you didn't and that's why we're giving you the benefit of the doubt."

I hurt. I hurt badly. I turned my attention away from Neal and back to my workout, or at least that's what it looked like. As he walked away, my chin fell to my chest, and for the first time I could remember, the tears began to well up while I had been wearing a football helmet. I ran a few more teary-eyed sprints before getting control and going inside. I hadn't missed a game due to injury since the first game of my senior year in high school almost five years ago to the day of the first game of my senior year in college.

Appropriate, I guess.

The next morning came too soon. I needed a few more days. If only I could have stopped time or moved the game back a week. My follow up visit with Dr. Matchette was short and not sweet. It didn't take him long to feel the way my knee opened up on the inside when he pried on it. He also found the direct pressure points which shot pain throughout my leg. By simply placing his index and middle finger at the midpoint on the inside of my knee, he made me squirm in disapproval.

"You still got quite a bit of elasticity in that MCL. It still opens up pretty good and you're also point tender all along the injured ligament," the doctor informed me.

"Bottom line doc, what about Saturday?"

"I know how badly you want to play, but there's just no way that I can release you while you have as much pain as you do."

That was really all I needed to hear. I hurt badly again, and for the second time in two days, I wept. Alone in the confines of my pickup truck, I found a moment for myself, and just sitting in the parking lot at the clinic, reflected on the previous two weeks. Part of me wants to feel as though I did all that I could, but missing out on an opportunity like the one on Saturday felt like utter failure. The big games we play each year against the nationally ranked competition don't mean anything in terms of conference standings, because, for the most part, MAC teams get beat up pretty bad in the non-conference. We schedule the big teams to make money, and for the off-hand chance at a major upset. Plus, as members of a small school team, we all look forward to seeing the immense 80,000 seat stadiums and the multitudes of fans that root their teams on each Saturday. It reminds all of us about what we dreamed about in high school as we were hoping to play in front of fans like that and in stadiums of such prowess. It's what we watched on t.v.



every Saturday following the Friday night game: the wild student sections, the broadcasters, the t.v. cameras, the sideline reporters, the fanfare that surrounds big-time college football. It's just not there in the MAC, never has been and probably never will be as long as the superconferences are the ones running the show. We're the little guys on the block, and unless some freaky stuff happens, we'll always be knocking on the door but never getting to come in.

Coach Lynch gave me the official word on Wednesday, saying that there was just no way he could take a guy who couldn't physically perform. I passed him in the hallway of our new facility and he said he needed to talk to me after practice. I nodded in approval because I knew what the conversation was going to be about. It wasn't too dramatic. I went through my normal rehab that day and headed out for the last ten minutes of practice as usual. After practice on my way off the field following mandatory gassers, pushups, and sittings, I caught up with Coach Lynch. He gave me the official word. Once again, nothing more than a nod and "okay." I thought I'd come to grips with it all, but I was wrong. It got worse 48 hours later.

It got worse when my roommates headed off for the airport. That day wasn't unlike any other Friday during the season other than I wasn't preparing to go on a trip. I wasn't packing my bags, making sure I had the proper clothing for the proper times. I hadn't shaved and showered and cut my hair. I wasn't drying my khakis to wear with the new long sleeved travel shirts and ties, which were required. I wasn't slinging the brand new travel bag over my shoulder as I made my way to the vehicle for the first trip of the season. No, I was dressed in an old pair of painting shorts and t-shirt with my face covered in about five days worth of growth, my normally bald head overgrown with my black hair, and I carried a very heavy heart. I said goodbye and good luck to the guys on my way out the door so I wouldn't have to watch them leave. As they were leaving for one of the most exciting weekends of their lives, I was heading to the Delaware County Building to finish my community service.

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One day, I'm going to have to look my teenage son in the eyes, tell him that he is going to make mistakes, but to not make the same mistakes that I did. I guess this doesn't sound too spectacular. I'm sure there's many soon-to-be-fathers across the globe who would make a similar statement. But seriously, it needs to be done because everyone needs to know and feel okay about making mistakes because it happens. I'm not talking about mistakes on the field or in the classroom, but rather off the field, in the public eye. Growing up in Newburgh, Indiana as the son of two well known and respected parents had a lot more advantages than disadvantages. Sure, whenever I went somewhere or did something, people generally knew who I was because of my dad, the local high school coach of twenty years. I walked the straight and narrow, always trying to be above what most other teenage kids were doing at the time. I didn't drink. I didn't smoke. I didn't hang out at parties or go to places where I wasn't wanted. As a sophomore, I ratted out a buddy for drinking because I thought it was the right thing to do. In the end though, it probably cost me because I wasn't like everyone else. But what were the costs?—a few missed parties, not hanging out with the “in-crowd” as much, always carrying the stigma of the guy who might go tell his dad what's going on. It didn't bother me in high school because I thought I was doing the right thing by being honest with my father. I guess I wasn't being a typical high school kid. I was always so conscious of not wanting to get in trouble or slander the name. “It's spelled L-I-D-Y,” my mom used to say. I was a good kid. The worst things me and my buddies did were vandalizing each others cars with shaving cream or Vaseline. Once, I took the Bronco mudding, sort of. It was more like just driving on an old dirt road after the rain but the rig was still covered top to bottom. But that was about it, so when I got to college, I was a rookie when it came to parties, late nights, and specifically alcohol.

My first party at which alcohol was present was on my recruiting trip. If you ask any one of my friends, specifically Teeters, about that night, he'd just chuckle and tell you how big of a dork I was. I wore my letter jacket, a nice collared shirt, and my glasses to the party full of football players and girls. The interesting note about that night though, was that I was the one driving everybody around. My host, Kevin Cartwright and his roommate Chris Corbett were both drinking before we left the dorm so I was in charge of driving to the party. This is my first night in Muncie, I'm cramped in a Toyota

Celica, it's freezing outside, and I'm supposed to be finding this party. Needless to say, we got there. The first thing that struck me was that these guys all had practice the next day, yet, they were all drinking. That year was the year BSU went to the Las Vegas Bowl so they were still practicing in December at the time of my recruiting visit. Anyway, Teeters' description of my conduct that night goes something like this: "We get to the party right, and we'd all been drinking, and we get there, and we see Lidy, standing in the corner, wearing his letter jacket with his glasses on. We go up to him, say what's up, and he says, 'Allen Lidy, linebacker from Newburgh, Indiana' like he's some big shit. Me and Sorrels are like, 'Who the fuck is this guy? What a tool box.' So we go and have a good time and Lidy just stands in the corner, yawning the whole night."

I must say that his story is fairly accurate. I remember being extremely tired. To me, the trip wasn't about the parties, the girls, or hanging out. It was about getting to know about Ball State. I guess I was just really naïve.

Once I got to Ball State though, that naiveté didn't last too long. Somehow, I remember it like it was yesterday. The first time I really got drunk was the night before the Marshall game my freshman year, about the fifth week of the season. A lot of the freshman would get together on Friday nights because we knew we weren't going to play so some guys would go out and others would stay in. It just so happened this night, we decided to stay in over in Teeters' and Billy's room. Now, it wasn't the smartest thing to do or the most mature, but it sure was fun. I never intended to drink that night. I went over to their room with Tony D and after a while, a game of "Kings" broke out. "Kings" is your run of the mill drinking game using cards picked out of a deck randomly. I watched for a good while, then with confidence stated, "I'm a card shark, I want in this game. It's not like I'm going to be drinking that much anyway." I just wanted to play cards, but it turned out to be a lot more than that. My first game in, I picked the fourth king, meaning I had to chug a full cup of brew. I picked that bitch up and slammed it. Tony D stands up and gives the now famous, "Holy shita!!" Everybody just sat in amazement. Here was this kid, never drank before slamming a whole cup of beer like it was nothing. After a few high fives, we settled down and began the next game. Low and behold, guess who gets the fourth king the second game? That's right, Lidy. Only this time, there was a shot of whiskey in the middle cup along with about 16 ounces of liquid

courage. It didn't faze me. Downed it again. By this time, I'm well on my way to the first of many drunk fests during my college career.

A few more be detailed as this story continues I'm sure, because they do add to the college experience. I mean, I "met" my fiancé at our second annual and final hog roast which is always a drunk fest so it can't be all that bad. One was though, and that was enough. One time, I let myself get too out of control. One time, I didn't listen to what my friends were telling me. One time, the alcohol got the better of me, and there is not a day that goes by when I don't think about it and how it affected my life. A month before reporting to camp, we went out on a typical Friday night. After having a few at CJ, Dave, and Shawn's house, we headed to Dill Street, the "best" club in the village. That night, CJ, an employee at the establishment, hooked us up with some electric lemonade and I slammed a couple Beam and Cokes as I walked in the door. Then, my true meathead side came out. I wanted to do a "smoke show" in my brand new truck. Why not I thought, people did them in Newburgh all the time. My buddies did dozens of them and never got in trouble so why should it be any different for me. Well, it was. As I flipped Teeters' off walking out the door towards my truck, I didn't even consider the time or place. One a.m. on one of the busiest streets in the village on a Friday night isn't the best time to do a smoke show, but I did it anyway. It wasn't long, but it was long enough for a cop car to roll in at the end of the block and see what I was doing. As I shut the truck off and stepped out of the car, I saw the red, blue, and white lights. I was toast. After administering the necessary tests, I was cuffed and taken to the University Police station where I was formally arrested and charged with operating while intoxicated (i.e.-DUI).

That night I spent in the Delaware County Jail was one of pain, regret, and anger. I kept pinching myself as I lay on the cold steel bench that was my bed to make sure that this was really happening. I kept adjusting the toilet paper roll that was my pillow just trying to sleep the night away. For being drunk enough so that normally, I would pass out, I couldn't keep my eyes shut. In those nine hours, I thought more about life, my lifestyle, my future, and my ways more than I had in the previous 22 years. I was in jail, a criminal. I talked with a few of the guards as they were putting me through the system and they kept talking about diversion and the first-time offenders program. I didn't know

what this was or how I could get into it, but I gathered enough to know that it was worth a shot. Jaime got a hold of a bail bondsman and she brought my checkbook and I gave him the 10% he required to post bail. That ten percent was \$500.00, or 80 hours of work on the farm. And that was just the beginning of my legal expenses. All tolled, I racked up close to a \$1200.00 bill to enter into the diversion program, pay a lawyer, post bail, and pay for the other costs associated with being arrested. This is the mistake I made. This is the one time in my life that I felt I let down every one around me. This is the one and only thing I am not proud of. I still have pride, but it's hard to look at those who care so much about me and what I'm doing, and not feel as though their views about me have changed. I'm still the same person I was before mid-July, just a little wiser and a very humbled. This mistake could cost me a lot more than I'll ever know, but because I entered diversion, it will be cleared from my record in August of 2002, about the time I'm planning on entering law school. Will this mistake screw that up? I don't know, but I have to be ready to face the consequences if it does.

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This brings me back to what I was doing the afternoon my teammates were heading for Auburn, Alabama. As they were having a short walk through in 85,000-seat Jordan-Hare Stadium, I was mopping the second floor of the county building. As they were walking on the trimmed Bermuda grass and standing next to the hallowed hedges that line the outskirts of the field, I was carrying tables and chairs out of a room and mopping the tile floors in the head. I never felt as small in my entire life as I did that afternoon. When I finished that evening, I headed home determined to never let my life fall into that kind of mess again.

When Jaime and I have children of our own, I'm going to tell them about their father's mistake. I'm going to tell them how it felt to know that my best friends in the entire world were doing what I should have been doing. I know the injury is what kept me from going, but I don't see it that way. I only see what it is that I was doing, namely mopping floors. Even today, it hurts my pride to think about this whole situation, but there is perseverance. Because of the support of my family and Jaime, it is in the past,

especially for them, though I still carry the burden every day. It will go away, but I will be better because of it. In fact, I think those were my dad's exact words. "I'm sure you've learned something from this and you'll be better because of it." My mom's words, "You made a mistake, one mistake. It's not the end of the world. Life goes on, and if anything, this shows that you're human, that you aren't perfect. There's nothing your father and I can say. You're a grown man who makes his own decisions, and we will always be proud of you because you are our son." I love my parents. They are strong willed, and I really appreciate the way they handled this situation. They could have gone off the deep end, but they stuck with me and never wavered in their support. I am grateful. And to my fiancé, she could have bailed. We weren't engaged then. She could have looked at me as a complete and utter screw up. Though she called me a "dumbass" more than once, she never stopped caring or helping me. I love her for that among other things. Love is witnessed in trying times, and those people really showed how much they loved me because they stuck with me.

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"All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go. I'm standing here outside your door. I hate to wake you up to say goodnight, so kiss me and smile for me, tell me that you'll wait for me. Hold me like you'll never let me go. Cause I'm leaving, on a jet plane, don't know when I'll be back again."

A.J. singing to Grace in *Armageddon*. Kind of reminds me of Jaime and myself. Jaime's my girl and she'll always be my girl. She doesn't know yet, but I've bought her engagement ring. She's sleeping right now while I'm typing so I feel pretty secure that she won't find out. I have the ring and the band safely stowed away in my sock drawer. Now, I just have to figure out when to ask her. I was going to do it tonight or tomorrow morning, but I need to talk to her dad first and I want to do something somewhat special but not stupid. I think it will be next week sometime before she leaves to go home for Thanksgiving. I need to do it though or else she'll find the ring. She's already admitted to me once that she snuck through my room a few weeks ago looking for it. I love her.

She's probably the most kind-hearted person on this planet. I don't think she'd hurt a fly if it were buzzing around her head (I know people say that figuratively, but I really mean it.) I wrote a story once, about a girl that I fell in love with. It was about a girl who made me see who I really was and who I could be. It was about a girl who showed me what it meant to truly care about something other than yourself and to consider other peoples' feelings in all that you do. I remember writing that story because it put into words something that I began to feel, a softening of my exterior. I let someone in, finally. I've always been a personal, private person, but she melted me and there was nothing I felt as though I couldn't tell her.

I think I fell in love when she wore the tight red shirt into Tony and my room in the spring of 1999. She didn't fall in love with me though. The story I tell is one of hardship on my part and of superficiality on her part.

I was just the fat roommate. When I met Jaime, she had taken a little bit of an attraction towards my roommate Tony. She didn't like me though. I weighed 255 pounds. I was just the redneck who likes wrestling, beer, and potato chips. Jaime didn't like me. I tried to flirt with her, but it never worked. She always thought I was being mean to her; at least that's what she says. Actually, I think I fell in love the night she taped wrestling for me. It was the inaugural night of UPN's Thursday night WWF Smackdown and I was scheduled to go to listen to people give their final presentations for one of my honors classes. This wasn't a normal scheduling, but rather an extra block necessary to get through all the presentations. Needless to say, I was pissed off all day long. I guess Jaime found out somehow, and within five minutes of my return to the dorm room, she showed up with the best news of the night. She had taped the show for me. I was jacked. I wanted to kiss her and make out right there, but I was 255 and fat. There was no way she was digging me. So, regretfully, I just kept my feelings bottled deep inside where no one could see them, down in the depths where loneliness resides.

Soon after school let out and summer commenced, I decided to drop the extra pounds for two reasons: One, to woo the girl of my dreams and, oh yea, to get in shape for the upcoming season. I knew there was another reason in there. Anyway, I talked with Jaime occasionally, but most of our conversations were one-sided. She complained about her long-time boyfriend and how much he sucked and I just listened on the other

end of the phone like I cared. I mean; I did care. I cared very much. I wanted to hear every single detail about how big of an asshole this guy was. She came down to Muncie for our annual hog roast and we ended up going on a walk at some point in the afternoon. I was getting pretty drunk because I had drank heavily the night before with my brother who had come up for the night. He slept in his car that night, in the passenger side of course, using a kiddie pool as a blanket. I wish I had gotten a picture of that one. Jaime comes down and we walk and we talk, mostly about her boyfriend again. Then we go to her brother's apartment, hang out with him and his friends for a while, then it's just Jaime and me. Of course, I try to throw on the old Lidy charm but it doesn't work. She gets all teary-eyed when I'm talking about my former dog, and I try to comfort her but it doesn't work. Then, I try the next tactic. "Hey, let's go get some food." So I take her Wendy's. Now, I'm only wearing black shorts, a wife beater and some sandals so it's not like I could've taken her to some glamorous restaurant. We eat and then drive over to the mall parking lot. But it's after 9:00 pm, the mall was closed, but we park anyway. It takes me like another hour of sweet-talking but I finally get the girl to kiss me. I mean, you talk about a struggle. We soon left that romantic spot and I showed her where I worked and then she had me drop her off at her brother's fraternity house. I wanted to kiss her again there, but she said, "I'm not sure how good of an idea that would be. I think you've had enough for tonight." Well, I thought that was it for me.

Fast-forward eight months. I'm sort of seeing this chick, no one special mind you, more of drunk hook-up than anything, when guess who comes waltzing back into my life? Yep, you guessed it, Jaime. All of a sudden, she's a little jealous that old Lidy's got a little girlie on the side. I couldn't believe it. Here's the girl of my dreams, gorgeous, sweet, sexy, thin, perky (you know what I'm talking about there), and I have the unfortunate position of being in a semi-relationship. What the shit is that? I was screwed, but it didn't take too long to make a decision. I told the other girl that I couldn't pass this opportunity up. Jaime was my girl, and I wanted her passionately. So, to make a long story short, after something like eight months of talking, building a friendship, and wooing, I finally got the chance with Jaime Lynn Kurzhal.

Sometimes, I look back and wonder how we made it through the first few months. Anytime new relationships begin, especially serious ones, you have to learn to adjust



your thinking and actions a little to suit the person you're with. I'm stubborn. I didn't want to change. I never had a girlfriend for over three months. I didn't know how to act. I didn't care. I loved her from day one, and that always ended up being enough. I've made mistakes along the way, but I can say now, without a shadow of a doubt, she's the best thing to happen to me since I've been here. She keeps me honest. She redirects me when I get off course. She's an ear when I need talk and she's a shoulder when I need a hug. Life isn't always perfect and you don't always get what you want, but having Jaime in my life has been a blessing. We share beliefs in God and Jesus Christ. We share likes and dislikes to some extent. We both like movies, and we both dislike people who mooch off of others. There, similarities. We're not that dissimilar. On the outside, it may appear that way, but on the inside, we are just about one.

I did it in a way only a girl like Jaime could truly love. I, Allen Lidy, proposed to her in the Muncie Mall parking lot the Monday before Thanksgiving 2002. Was it romantic? Not to most. Was it overly creative? Not to most. But it was special because of the way it happened. The Sunday night before, Jaime asked me, about how she did every day for the past month, "So, you gonna ask me to marry you today?"

"No, but I am tomorrow."

"Yeah right," she said. "You're never going to ask."

"I bet you 600 dollars I ask you tomorrow."

"No way, you just don't want me to have to pay you back because you're not going to get the money anyway."

Sidenote: Jaime owed me some money

"Bet me."

Well, she didn't bet me, but I went through with the plan anyway. Since we both had night class that night, I wanted to take her to Wendy's afterwards and then to the parking lot of the mall, kind of as a reenactment of our first kiss together. She tried to ruin it though. Because my old roommate Tony was in town, we all wanted to go out to the End Zone for wings and beer, but I wanted to get this engagement in first because I thought Jaime would be going home the next day for Thanksgiving break. Therefore, I ask Jaime, "Why don't we go get some food?"

“Food, why would we go get food? I thought you were going to the End Zone with Tony.”

I couldn't believe it. Here I am, holding a \$1200 ring in my pocket and Jaime's trying to ruin my plan. So, we all decide to go to the bar and that almost killed my plan. I didn't fully decide to go through with it until we got to Jaime's car. She asked if I wanted to drive and I said no at first then quickly changed my mind. Since I had control of the car, we could go wherever I wanted. A new plan quickly came to mind.

I turned right out of the alley and then headed east towards the mall. Immediately, Jaime pipes in, “This isn't the way to the End Zone.”

“Sure it is,” I say without any hint of disturbance or nervousness.

“Where are we going?”

“To the End Zone.”

She never caught on. As I turned onto the street heading toward the mall, Jaime again makes another brilliant statement.

“The mall's closed.”

I would hope so. It was almost ten o'clock.

“You can't buy anything now.”

“Oh, I can't? Shoot. I guess there's no reason to come here then.”

We pull into the parking lot, the same one where it had all started. I threw the gearshift into park, looked at Jaime, welled up a little and said, “I wanted to come to the place where we started our first life together and make it so we can start our second life together here as well.”

With that I popped the ring box out of my jacket pocket and asked, “Will you marry me?”

• \* \* \* \* \*

**The following passage by Jaime Lynn Kurzhal is her account of inception, evolution, and climax of her relationship with the author.**

Yeah, his story is pretty much fictionalized. We did just start out as friends, and yes, I did get a little jealous when he told me that he'd been seeing some girl, but I

thought I felt something before that. It wasn't eight months either between the time we kissed for the first time at the hog roast and when I told him that I kind of liked him. We kissed towards the end of June and started going out towards the end of October. What's that, four months? Also, about that hog roast day, the day of our first kiss, he was the one who got all teary-eyed when he started telling me about his old dog Max. I didn't cry at all. We were just sitting in my brother's apartment and he starts in on this story about his old dog, and wham, he's got tears rolling down his cheeks so don't believe everything you read. I wasn't the one crying and it wasn't eight months. The day that sticks out in my mind is the day early in the fall when he came over to my house when my best friend Suzanne was in town.

I don't remember why he came over, he just did. I was sitting on my couch watching *Hope Floats* with Suz when he came in and just laid down on the couch and put his head in my lap and looked up at me with those big brown eyes and just started gabbing away. "Whatcha watching?"

"*Hope Floats.*"

"Oh, you mean *Shit Floats.*"

He hated that movie but it's always been one of me and Suzi's favorites. Anyway, we watched it and I just sat there and stroked his bald head as we all talked. After he left, Suzi asked me more about him and I just smiled and said that we were "friends" and that he's always there if I ever need anything. She kind of probed about a possible relationship between Lidy and I, but I had just never thought about it. I'd been so stuck on my old boyfriend and getting over him had been so difficult that I just didn't want to start anything new. Still, when your best friend tells you something like that, you have to listen. I don't think I ever looked at Lidy the same way again.

I think what sealed the deal was at some point during the football season, I was really feeling bad about my breakup with my boyfriend as we had tried to reconcile and things just didn't work out. I called Lidy late one night and asked him to come over. He said that he had to get up in the morning to catch the team flight to Army but would still come over for a while. We sat on the front porch of my house until after 3:00 in the morning. I just sat and smoked a pack of cigarettes and he just held me in his arms under an old Notre Dame blanket. I cried a little and we just talked. Later he told me he was

hoping to come over and get “lucky,” but when he saw that I was pretty messed up, he decided to just be a friend. He really showed that he cared that night, but I guess I wasn’t ready for a relationship, but at the same time, he never asked. I didn’t even know he was seeing anybody until one night the next week when we were all sitting in his house waiting to go out. That’s when I got a little jealous. Somebody was taking my friend away from me or so I thought. It wasn’t that I wanted him to stop seeing the other girl, but just that I wanted to let him know that I was interested in a relationship. Luckily, that was all he needed to hear, I guess.

We started off pretty rocky like most couples did. Lidy and I were just different in many regards, but after some pretty nasty fights, a couple of near breakups, and a couple of “off” times, we learned how each other ticked. I know that I get over-emotional sometimes about small things, and I know that he is stubborn all the time. Those two respective traits are usually the two things that get us going. I just want to sit and talk and for him to listen and he wants to watch t.v. or do homework. He likes to keep his schedule tight and do everything by lists while I just like to do things spontaneously. Lidy and I found a common ground after struggling and making up many, many times. He just wouldn’t understand that if I was mad at him, he needed to come over to my house and sit with me and talk. He hated that. There were times that we’d fight, I get mad and start crying, and he would just sit over at his house and say something like, “Okay, I guess I’ll talk to you tomorrow.” No, I don’t think so. We’ll talk now, but that’s just how we were. Now though, I don’t think Lidy and I would know what to do without each other.

I guess you’re probably wondering why I call him “Lidy” all the time. Well, that’s what everyone calls him. When I first told my parents about him, I called him Lidy and so, the first time they met, they called him Lidy, too. When we met back in the dorms, I knew him as Lidy. He explained to me that it was his last name, but like everyone else on the football team, you typically go by one name or another, like a handle. Lidy’s roommate, Tony DelAngel, was “Tony.” Jason Teeters was “Teeters.” Brian Conn was “Conn.” Chad Ludwig was “Lud.” Aaron Johnson was “A.J.” It’s how it is for everyone so I knew Allen Lidy as “Lidy.” It was funny also when I was around him and his parents for the first time and I kept calling him that. They couldn’t believe

that their son's new girlfriend was calling him by his last name, and even more, her parents called him by his last name as well. Even today, I tend to call him Lidy and my parents always do. However, when my last name changes, I don't expect too many people to be addressing me as "Lidy." We'll probably be married fifty years and at our anniversary party, I'll stand up and address the crowd with something along the line of: "Lidy and I really appreciate you all for coming..."

I guess, finally, I should discuss the engagement scenario in my terms. In May of 2001, Lidy and I attended the wedding of one of his friends from high school. At the wedding, his mother said something to me about helping us purchase furniture or other items for our first apartment together. Now, Lidy and I had talked about marriage before, but never in "real" terms like Nancy was using. I mean, living together. Well, I must say that within minutes, I was getting a little warm and needed some fresh air. I asked Lidy to take a walk with me so we did, heading out to a park bench on the street. Sitting there, we began talking for real about marriage for the first time, and he made it sound like he'd been thinking about it for months. From that day forth, I expected a ring at any time. Then, as the months went by and no ring found its way onto my finger, I got a little bit confused. Hadn't we discussed marriage? Didn't we say that we were most likely getting married? Now, you just don't fool around with that word around girls and I don't think Lidy quite understood that. A girl looks forward to her wedding day more than anything else so you can imagine my surprise when, on our two year "anniversary," Lidy gave me a turtleneck sweater and *Rocky IV*, which I'd just bought the week before while we were in the mall together. I just couldn't believe it. But, he didn't make me wait too long because within a month, we were engaged, and okay, I guess he got the engagement night story pretty accurate.

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## Chapter Two

Looking out across a field never before visible from the old stadium weight room from my position on the stairmaster in the new weight room, it's easy to ponder things that have happened the last four years while rehabbing. Unfortunately, the football aspects of these things have been overall negative. There haven't been many exciting times or memories made inside the old concrete structure on the west and the bleachers to the north, south and east. Well, actually the south is now occupied by a 6 million dollar facility, one that was promised me and twenty other recruits in the winter of 1996. We all came for the visit in the middle of the Cardinals preparation for the Las Vegas Bowl. They even practiced on the Saturday morning that we were there. One of the most memorable moments of the trip for me, as I'm sure it was for all of us, was the composite photograph they showed the recruits of what they hoped the stadium and immediate surrounding area would look like within five years. There was an artificial turf field to the south of the game field along with a huge building in the south endzone. The stadium itself was drawn in a manner resembling a horseshoe shape. The west side had been totally renovated with a three tiered press box and all new brick façade. The facility in the south endzone looked like a two story building with the lockerroom, meeting rooms, weight room and training room on the first floor with luxury sweets and coaches' offices on the second floor. This display showed the commitment to football by the university. I was highly impressed.

Fall camp 1997, just a freshman, I was wide-eyed and ready to go from day number one. I loved it from the time I left Newburgh, Indiana with Nathan Boyd. We had breakfast at the Cracker Barrel, it had almost become a ritual by then, then headed up 164 North to 57 N. After about 60 miles we turned right at Wickes Lumber and headed for Bloomington. Once to Bloomington, we took 37 N to 465 E and then on up to 69 N. The whole trip is about four hours as Newburgh is about as far away from Muncie one can get and still be in Indiana. Combine that with no direct route of travel, and you quickly learn to live on your own and get over homesickness because it's not that easy to get home.

"Man, can you believe the new facility we're going to get?" I asked my pal and position mate Tony DelAngel on one of our first days of camp.

"Yeah, that's going to be sweet. We'll probably have the new lockerrooms and stuff within a year or two don't ya think?"

"Hell yeah, man. There's no way were going to be stuck in this damn place for much longer. Just look at the weight room, plus, we can't even really meet as a team."

Ball State Stadium was built in the late 1960s, and I really don't think the bowels of the stadium have really changed much since then. Players enter the old facility under the south end of the big side on a old concrete sidewalk. To the left is the one story, cinder block building painted white, and at this point, a very dirty white. Painted in a red section is the word "TRADITION." Past this are the red double doors that enter into the atrium which holds the trophy cases and other displayed awards. The atrium is about four steps long and leads to either a right or left turn. Turn left to go to the weight room. A small room by today's standards full of very old equipment that showed more rust than iron. By turning right, one enters into the long hall that housed the coaches' lockers, meeting room, and shower and the equipment room and training room. The equipment room resembled a prison issue station more than an equipment room. Just looking through the grates when they were shut makes one wonder how we ever got what we needed. Next to the equipment room was the training room. I would approximate 300 square feet. It contained a whirlpool, an ice machine, eight taping tables and a series of cabinets. To get to the treatment area, we had to go outside, where we could see the underside of the concrete bleachers. The "Outback" was where the rehab took place. Blazing hot in the summer and ice cold in the winter.

The condition of the facility only got worse as one enters into the locker room. The room doesn't make effective use of space and 105 lockers are jammed into a room that could probably fit 70 comfortably. My freshman year was easy though because we dressed down at the end of the facility in the visitor's locker room. They did this to ease the crowding in the big locker room but I really liked it because it kept us all together. We were able to form a bond down in that locker room that transferred onto the field. I believe we were the last group that dressed down there. The following year, Coach Lynch decided to rescind the rule because he thought it was detrimental to the makeup of

the team. Never did a day pass that we could walk from end to end of that facility and not either feel the dampness of the rain or humidity, the heat of the summer, or smell the sewage that seemed to constantly back up. We all thought it was sewage anyway. Nothing's worse than trying to listen to your coach and watch film while smelling strong moldy, sewage odors the whole while. Then, during the times when there may not have been a smell or the winter had come to take away the heat, the heaters would quit or begin blowing cold air. It was almost as if they worked in reverse. Blowing hot air in the summer during fall camp and cold air during the winter. Then, there would be the incessant squeaking of those damn vents. REEE REEE REEE REEE

"Now, we got to squeeze the ISO!!"

REEE, REEE, REEE

"Better, better. Now, flip your hips on the under."

REEE REEE REEE

Meetings often had this type of sound.

You pick up the schedule pretty quick when you want to really be part of something. I've always been one to be on time and be in the right place, but this was something totally different, but at the same time, easy once you got a feel for it. Those first few days I learned that you had to be at the stadium in plenty of time in order to get taped, get treatment, and get dressed in order to be at the meetings on time. You don't show up at meetings with one ankle taped or in your street clothes, so if meetings started at 0800, then it's a pretty good idea to be in the locker room about 0700 to get ready.

Meetings before practice are the worst, and that first year, I really don't have any great mental pictures from pre-practice meetings. Two that do stick out though came very early in the year, and are totally different in what happened. The first happened at some point during fall camp, maybe on the same day that Tony and I were talking about how cool the new stadium was going to be. A couple of older guys, Howard Simms and Jeff Phelps, both fifth-year seniors, happened to overhear what we were talking about.

"You boys are crazy. You believe that shit."

"Hey man, they showed us the pictures on our recruiting visits. They said it's all going to be done within five years."



“Man, they told us that on our recruiting visits. They showed us those same pictures, and look where we are now.”

“You’re shitting me?”

“Nope.”

Talk about a dashing of hopes. Tony and I just looked at each other in disbelief. How could officials show and basically promise potential athletes something without ever coming through. We just didn’t think there was any way we’d be in the old building for more than a year. Fast forward: Tony D never suited up for practice in the new facility. By the time we moved in, he was in Auburn, AL, working as the Graduate Assistant for the Auburn Tigers strength and conditioning program.

The second memory occurred following our first game of the year. We had played Miami at their place in Oxford, Ohio. Miami and Ball State are natural rivals mainly because of geography, we’re only about 70 miles apart, but also because we have really had some classic battle in the past years. This doesn’t even take into consideration the fact that they don’t respect us, as we are a relative newcomer to the MAC in comparison to Miami. Anyway, they had beaten us pretty soundly the previous Saturday and you could tell everyone was a little irritated about the game.

The grade sheets are being handed out to the guys who played and then, all of a sudden, WHHAAAAMMM!!!! The fist came down on the video cart.

“We’re never going to lose to these fuckers again!!! From now on, we’re going to kick their fucking asses whenever we play them!!! Everything we do from this point forward is to kick their ass!!! Now, let’s watch some film.”

Welcome to college football young bucks.

I had known Coach Curt Mallory for over two years at this point and never before had I ever seen him so pissed or so intense. However, it was amazing to see how instantly his demeanor changed in that short time span. He went from seemingly very calm while passing out the grade sheets and setting up the projector to irate when he began to talk to us. He hit his clipboard that was sitting on top of the projector cart and I thought he broke it. Then, as suddenly as the storm came down upon us, it disappeared when he began the film study. Of course there were times during the film that he got

pissed, but it was nothing like at the beginning. But it was something that had us young linebackers talking about for weeks to our teammates.

This all brings me back to what there is now in the fall of 2001. I can see the game field from inside the new facility, specifically from the weight room. Construction on the new facility began in earnest before the 2000 season and it really hasn't stopped since. It's pretty much the running joke as to what's going to happen next. If I may list some of the problems that I am aware of in order of their occurrences.

Flooding caused by hitting some sort of natural spring where the foundation was dug. Water was pumped out on a constant basis for weeks. I really don't know what happened, but I don't think it's a problem.

The projected completion date was July 1, 2001 which would have given us enough time to finish summer workouts there and then make a smooth transition into fall camp. To put it simply, we taped and dressed in the old locker room for the first two or three days of fall camp this year and that was in second week of August. And even when we did move into the new place, they still hadn't fully completed work in the locker room and the weight room was completely bare.

Speaking of the weight room, the weights got lost on their way from California then they got lost on their way from Cincinnati, so we had to lift in "They Yard" aka "Muscle Beach" for the first 10 days of camp.

The training room was a joke. They cut the funding for the training room so all the equipment from the old facility was brought over and put in the new facility. It really looked pretty trashy. Then, the 1 million dollar Hydroworx pool that was installed in the training room only managed to work about 50% of the time. It's been drained and fixed more than anything we've ever had before and it cost about one-sixth of the total price for the whole building. If we would have gotten rid of that, the training room could have been bigger and the weight room would have been closer to 8,000 square feet instead of the 5,000 it is. Wade Russell, our strength and conditioning coordinator had hoped for 10,000, but his dimensions got squeezed.

We have a lounge that houses a big screen tv and within three days of being installed, the tv broke. Then, the place where the tv was supposed to go wasn't really functional so they dressed it up with some other paraphernalia. Also, the lounge contains

furniture that looks like it belongs in the home of the vertically challenged, not in the lounge made for football players.

It leaks. The facility leaks from the scoreboard down into the weight room so we have to cover our equipment with large sheets of plastic. Frequent visitors probably think we're painting everyday or something.

However, after all these things, what takes the cake is the backwards Cardinal head on the scoreboard. Whoever put it up, put it up the wrong way so it cost us something like 5,000 dollars to reverse it.

All in all though, I can't complain. At least I get the new place for one year while others who were promised the same thing years before never got to enjoy it.

You could call it "Muscle Beach" if you wanted, or better yet, "The Yard." It went by a variety of nicknames but what it was definitely looked like it belonged inside the walls of some state penitentiary. Because the old locker room didn't have a space big enough to accommodate a full team meeting, we decided to rid the facility of the old weight room and put in its place a meeting room that would serve other administrative uses. But we needed a weight room at the stadium because during fall camp and early in the season, our lifting coincided with the times we were at the stadium. To solve this problem, we moved the weights underneath the east stands, aluminum bleachers so the equipment was open to all types of weather. Also, they had to make sure the equipment wasn't accessible so it had to be put inside locked gates and fences. The benches and racks were placed directly on the rip-rap ground, not concrete or rubber or anything. The coaches could observe us from elevated stair cases as wardens and guards would do around the prison walls. The weights and bars got even rustier out there than they had the previous years having been inside the humidity ridden locker room. "The Yard" was almost a comical sideshow to the strength and conditioning aspect of our program because nothing else about it was a joke at all.

Growing up as a gym rat, I thought I'd seen and done it all. Twenty rep squats. High intensity workouts. Three to six workouts a week. Six minute miles. Testing. Coming into college, I was confident about my ability to hang in the weight room. I knew I wasn't the strongest or fastest, but I knew what work meant. Or so I thought. As freshmen on the scout teams, we were expected to lift four times a week before practice,

and not in “The Yard.” By this time, we were practicing once a day so we were expected to go to the Arena weight room sometime after our morning classes and before 1400 practice. For most of us, there was about a two hour window of opportunity to get the workout done.

Wade Russell didn’t hold back on the rookies. He let us have it right from the get go. We had been on campus less than a month, had experienced college football for approximately four weeks, when he introduced to us the nut cutter of all nut cutter workouts. One minute rest workouts before practice. Three sets of anywhere from 8 to 12 repetitions with one minute of rest between sets and exercises. Therefore, if we had 8 exercises with three sets apiece, we’d be doing 24 lifts total. If you factor in about a minute for each lift and then a minute in between, it’s approximately a 45 minute workout. And it was. I remember my mistake the first time I went into the weight room for one minute rest and it was a mistake I would never make again.

I had gotten out of class around noon and had to be to the weight room around 1300 so I went to Courtside to get a sandwich. I had the Ray McCallum special. It was grilled chicken fajita strips, lettuce, tomato, cheese, and mayo on a big sub bun. Add a bag of chips and wash it down with some juice and I had myself some lunch. Well, let’s just say that lunch didn’t last long. Tuesday was leg day and that meant squats. I don’t remember what my weights were, but after my second set of ten with one minute rest, I slowly walked over to the trash can and let them fly. Out came the chips, juice, and Ray McCallum special.

“Yeahhhhhhhhhh!!! Let’em fly!!!!!!! Chunks!!!!!!! Lidy! Lidy! Lidy!”

“Something wrong Allen?” Wade asked me.

“Ha ha, very funny. Blaagh, blaagh. I think this is the last time I eat before doing this shit.”

That first year of conditioning was hellacious, tougher than anything I’d ever done. From in-season workouts to winter conditioning, there was no letting up. We busted our asses four days a week, twice a day on those days. During the winter, it was a lift and run every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. When a lot of people were packing up to go home Friday afternoon for the weekend, we were heading to sweltering Irving Gym to run sprints, shuttle drills, bag drills, and rope drills. The workouts, in

retrospect, were relatively short, but for 19 year old kids just learning the ropes, we didn't think it could get any worse. As the years went by and as we became "veterans" of winter conditioning, we took on the responsibility to freak all the young guys out by telling them it was the hardest stuff ever. It was all mental because by my second year, we had switched to a 6 a.m. running program twice a week rather than the four-day-a-week program of my freshman year. We switched to the early morning workouts because the coaches thought it would be best to have the entire team run together rather than in two big groups. I, personally, never liked what we did because in my opinion, no one is capable of performing at maximum efficiency after being awake for only about 25 minutes. The older you got, the better you began to understand the best ways to get through the early conditioning. The biggest thing was not to let it mess with your head, because once you got it in your head that this was hard, then the hour just seemed to take forever. Winters always seemed short and I'm not sure that our program really benefited as much as it should have considering the amount of time and effort put into it. I don't think we ever really maximized efficiency because of limited access to facilities and space to work.

Those two hindrances changed in the summer because for the most part, football players were the only ones around and a football field is plenty of room for 30 guys to run on. The real work is done in the summer time. That's when Wade takes us out into the midday heat and kicks our ass for up to an hour or more. My first summer wasn't overly difficult. We ran on the practice fields because they were just finishing installing the new turf practice field. That summer was tough, but the second summer is when I learned what it really takes to beat things mentally. I very first day of the summer of 1999, Wade took the dozen or so of us who showed up for 3:30 p.m. running into the stadium. We figured we'd be on the turf, but we were wrong. Then, as he pulled his Explorer up next to the home side, everyone noticed how the back end was bottomed out. When he opened the back hatch, a new world of pain was released.

About an hour later, all twelve of us were laid out on the plush fescue of the game field, completely exhausted after having completed only half of what Wade had envisioned for us. Half was all we needed. In his mind, Wade believed we should run four sets of three stadiums followed by four sets of four quarters. A stadium consisted of

running up the bleachers, not the steps and then coming back down. Four quarters was a combination of 25 pushups, sittings, squat thrusts, and mountain climbers. That doesn't sound too difficult though does it? Oh yeah, I forgot to mention the 75 pound sandbags we slung on our backs as we went up the stadium and back down. After the first three trips up and down, there were guys doubled over, cramping, almost crying. There weren't any chunks that first day, but the pain was etched on every single face. The pushups looked like hip dips and elbow bends while the squat thrusts and mountain climbers took the appearance of some sort of mating position. After two of the prescribed four sets, Wade called a halt to the experience. That was the first day. From that point on, we did sandbags once a week.

By the end of the summer, we finally reached the twelve reps that Wade wanted, but it wasn't without cost. There were guys puking just about every week. The big guys never fully recovered between the time of going up and down the stairs to the time of doing the four quarters. Some of those guys weighed close to 300 pounds, making them nearly 400 with the sandbag. Forty-one rows of bleachers up and down is a long weigh to haul 400 pounds. There were those of us who specialized in the sandbags. The guys who weighed in at around 200 to 225 had the advantage because they had the strength as well as the conditioning to really push it up and down. I, for one, would run up and then run down as well. My theory was: the sooner I get up there and get back down, the sooner I can get the damn sandbag off of my back. My partner, which was usually Tony didn't necessarily care for this technique because it would really cut down on his rest time. He would always bitch at me, "Lidy, you asshole, slow the fuck down! Wade, what's wrong with this fucking guy?" I would just kind of laugh as I handed him the bag. However, he shouldn't be the one to bitch because he went after just as hard as I did. Without bragging, I'd say that Tony, Nate Andrews, and I were three of the more proficient luggers of the sandbags. I liked it. It sounds weird, but I really did. I knew, that if I could push myself to carry that bag up and down those stairs without stopping to rest or relax, I could push myself through any obstacle down the road. We only did those sandbags that one summer, and it was my favorite summer.

## Chapter Three

### *Non-Conference Schedule*

I stand. I watch. I get frustrated. I get stiff. The whole leg is aching now, no longer just the knee as I stand and watch at practice. I'm wearing a Donjoy model kneebrace, one that wasn't necessarily custom made for me but still pretty good fitting. My old roommate, Tony, wore it last year following his recurring knee injuries. In fact, he sprained his MCL, too, except he got to the point where it was chronic and really limited his ability to play effectively. He's gone now; down at Auburn University as a graduate assistant for the strength and conditioning staff; his football career cut short by a year because of his bad knee. We came in together, played the same position, linebacker, the first year, and then he got switched to fullback in the spring. The following year, our mandatory second in the dormitories, we were roommates, pretty much inseparable. We lifted together, ate together, got drunk together. We also lived together the next year in a little house off-campus with my roommate from my freshman year, Brian, the quarterback. Anyway, he's gone now but I got his brace and it's beginning to piss me off because it's awkward and I think it's having an effect on the way that I run which is causing pain in the inside of my thigh and outside and above my hip, right above my left-ass cheek. My lower back is starting to hurt to and that's a pretty good indication that something is wrong especially since I generally don't have lower back pain.

People who know I play constantly ask if I'm going to play this week or is it still too soon? "Hell no" I want to tell them. It's not too soon anymore. I mean the thing still hurts but I can play. The biggest problem is now getting back to being part of the team again. When you're not out there for weeks at a time, it's easy to be forgotten a little bit, especially during the season. The guys who play a lot early are going to be the ones playing down the stretch so it really doesn't behoove a guy to miss four weeks right at the beginning of the season. I'm probably the only player in America who has done two radio interviews for the local station in the first four weeks of the season but has yet to play a single down of football. It's just frustrating.

As I said earlier, I spent my weekend of the Auburn game in Muncie, but I still got the joy of listening to it on the radio. Listening to Morrie Mannies, our longtime

announcer, do the play-by-play over the radio for the first time in my life left me wanting for a trip to the dentist. As a football person, I can easily envision all twenty-two players on the field at one time and also make mental pictures in regards to how the offense and defense are attacking, as long as I have some stimulus. Morrie was just horrible to listen to. He's a great fan and a tremendous supporter for Ball State athletics, but I couldn't stand listening to the broadcast. I think, according to him, we ran about a dozen "sprint draws" on the afternoon when we don't even have a sprint draw in the playbook. Also, I never could even picture how Auburn was lined up defensively or how they were attacking us on offense. It was all personal commentary in regards to how bad we looked and how good they looked. Former Cardinal and a good friend of mine Aaron Johnson came be the house to listen to the game and by halftime; we were flat out pissed, not only at Morrie and the other members of the Cardinal Broadcasting team, but at the team's inability to compete with the Tigers. We were down 24-0 with the last seven coming on a short pass to their 280 pound tightend who broke three tackles and hurdled a defensive back before diving into the endzone with under a minute to play. They killed us with the big play and their defense didn't let us cross the fifty-yard line. Things didn't get much better in the second half though our defense did step up a little and limited them to two field goals. However, our offense and all those "sprint draws" got shut out.

Nearly every Monday the last five autumns has been similar. The headlines in the school paper read something like, "Cardinals Lose Again" or "Cards Run Out of Steam in Second Half" or "Losses Mounting for Ball State." Then, when we go to the stadium for meetings, it's the same thing.

"I'm not disappointed about the effort. You guys played hard, there's no doubt about that. We just have to get better. We can't have the mental and physical breakdowns at key times if we're going to win these kind of ball games."

It's really almost something that Coach Lynch could have written down before each season and memorized so he'd never have to work on his Monday team speeches. I'm not knocking what he was saying by any means though, because, more often than not, he was exactly right. In the five years I spent playing, only on two or three Saturdays did it appear that our team didn't come ready from an emotional or mental standpoint. And when that happened, we were told. But still, it is difficult to hear the same things over



and over again, especially when you think you're good enough to be beating the teams who are beating you.

That thought is what quickly became the focus during the second week of the 2001 season. Kentucky, a cellar-dwelling SEC team was next in line. They weren't prospected to have a successful season and had also gone through some legal turmoil with the NCAA so they did have a lot of distractions. Furthermore, their athletes compared favorably to ours. In the past, when going to Florida or Kansas State, we kind of knew going in that we were in way above our heads just in terms of athleticism. In football, unlike basketball, eventually, the greater athletes who are bigger, stronger, and faster generally take over. What I'm saying is that in basketball, a very quick, strong, and athletic team can be beaten by a team who shoots the lights out or takes care of the ball and uses the shot clock to its advantage. Just look at the NCAA tournament. Every year, a double-digit seed takes out a higher seed and sometimes advances deep into the tournament. In football, a team with less talented players may be able to hang for a while, but generally, the more talented team will force turnovers, create big plays, and find ways to win. This talent void is where we were against teams like Auburn, Florida, and Kansas State, but by the end of film sessions on that Monday night, we knew we could play with the Wildcats from the beginning of the game to the very end.

"We played hard, we played smart, but we just can't give up the big plays at crucial times and fail to make the big plays ourselves."

Two days earlier, we had almost ran twice the amount of plays as our opponent. We had outgained them by nearly 100 yards. We had the ball for nearly two-thirds of the game and had twice as many first downs. Yet, we found a way to lose. Kentucky shouldn't have beaten us. We controlled the game but gave up two scoring drives that each consisted of less than two minutes. One of the drives came towards the end of the half with us in front. Regardless of what could have been, we didn't beat a superconference team for the first time. It was almost disgusting because we did exactly what we said we were going to do offensively: Line it up and smash them with our big running backs. Through film study, our coaches felt that the interior of their defensive line was strong and that they were good pass rushers, but that if we could get into the secondary, then our big backs could do some damage running the ball. And they did.

The defensive backs from UK didn't want to come up and hit, and as a result, we pushed them around all day. However, the UK offense didn't have to push us, they just ran by us because of our mental errors and lack of aggressiveness. What should have been a Ball State victory turned into another mark in the loss column.

I made the trip to UK as a civilian with my mom, dad, and Jaime. That game was played on September 8, 2001. Our next game was scheduled for the following Saturday against Southern Illinois in Ball State Stadium. I was planning on dressing for that game for the first time of the 2001 season. I wasn't sure if I'd get to play, but I wanted to be out there in uniform for the game. It was supposed to be our home opener.

● \* \* \* \* \*

Osama bin Laden became a household name on September 11, 2001, and for the next week, our great nation stood still as the rubble that was the World Trade Center and Pentagon became almost a beacon of light showing the determination and strength of a country. Once again, it amazes me how everything that happens in my life seems in one way or another to be affected by football or associated with football. The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> were no different. That morning, I went into the training room early for treatment on my still injured left knee, and as I went into the training room, a trainer asked if I saw what happened. I simply said that I hadn't and he directed me towards a television screen. What I saw was a burning building, and it didn't shock me. Looking back on it now, I can't believe it. "Wow, whoever did that is going to pay, and when Bush takes care of them, his rating is going to go way up." One of the biggest, most massive assaults on our country was taking place and I'm making a comment regarding the approval rating of the yearling President. What makes it worse is, I went to the weight room within a minute of seeing the pictures on television. I went and stairmastered for thirty minutes then headed down to the football office to watch film. I watched film for about an hour without even really giving second thought to what was going on. Then, as I was leaving the office, Marlene, the secretary asked me if I had been watching what was going on.

"No, I was watching film."

“Oh my, a second plane hit and then another one hit the Pentagon.”

Finally, I was stirred. I guess it just didn't register with me. It's embarrassing, but I will say that from the moment I left the office, I was in tune with the situation the entire time. What should I blame my initial disinterest on? The fact that I'm nobody living in Muncie, Indiana or the fact that I've never been to New York or did I just think this was some sort of movie? Did it not go through my head that there were hundreds, potentially thousands of people in those buildings who were dying horribly painful deaths? Did I not fear for my freedom at that very moment? I honestly don't know. I guess part of me just thought a pilot had lost control of his plane and then for the hour or so when I was not in touch with reality, my mind was on different things. It sounds terrible now, and I am nearly ashamed in the way I reacted.

As everyone knows, those attacks did more to disrupt the daily lives of Americans than anything else this past quarter-century. Everyone was tugged at the heartstrings as the horror and fallout seemed to span from Maine to California. Every aspect of life was changed, sports included. Games were cancelled or postponed. Security was tightened everywhere. American flags flew like never before as we all rallied behind the words of President Bush. It was a historical time. I remember driving through the village later that afternoon with Jaime and we saw the newspaper vendors on the sidewalks selling the “Extra, Extra” copies of the paper. Never before had I seen anything like that. It was almost as if we were driving through the set of a movie or the streets of New York, where newspapers are sold on every corner. That Saturday, we were supposed to play Southern Illinois, but it was cancelled and not rescheduled. Also, Western Michigan's game with Michigan was postponed to the following week, the date when we were supposed to play at WMU. It looked as if we were going to have two open weeks in a row, but Northern Iowa, against their preferences, decided to make the trip to Muncie. They came in, and they beat us. But the ceremony before that game, one that was mirrored around the nation, is what I will most remember.

Normally, we stay in the locker room until after the playing of the national anthem, but not on this day. On this day, we honored America. Also, Ball State University President, Blaine Brownell addressed the audience as we all stood around the edge of the field, helmets tucked neatly under our arms. It was a beautiful day, one fit

for the recognition of our country. There were American flags flying high on the east side of the stadium in the places where the other MAC schools' flags usually hang. The big American flag in the northeast corner was at half-mast, as was the one outside the west side of the stadium. *America the Beautiful* and the *Star-Spangled Banner* were played in succession as tears were shed, and prayers said. We proved on that day, in our little corner of the world, that we would not succumb to terrorism. We would rise above, fight back, and recapture the spirit that drives our nation. They struck a blow, but as a collective nation, we began delivering a series of knockout punches which started in the small towns and communities across the United States. I won't remember the loss that day or the fact that it was the first game for which I suited up for this season. I will remember the emotion in the stands, the words of President Brownell, and the way it touched us all as we did our small part in bringing terrorism to its knees.

• \* \* \* \* \*

It's all in front of us, all of it. The goals that we as a team set out in front of us before the beginning of the season can still be reached. Losing to Northern Iowa, Kentucky, and Auburn doesn't mean a thing right now. We are a Mid-American Conference team, not an SEC or Gateway team. That means we have yet to play a MAC game, thus, in essence, everyone in the conference is on level territory.

The MAC is really becoming a super-conference, not in the sense that it has superior talent or superior teams, but rather that it is huge. The MAC used to be a normal conference such as the Big Ten, crowning a yearly champion based upon records within the conference. In fact, the last time we won the conference title in 1996 was the last year of the old conference format. Now, it encompasses thirteen universities at the present times with operations in the works to potentially add another. There are two divisions, the East and the West. The Ball State Cardinals compete in the West Division along with the Northern Illinois Huskies, Western Michigan Broncos, Central Michigan Chippewas, Eastern Michigan Eagles, and the Toledo Rockets. The East Division is comprised of the Marshall Thundering Herd, Akron Zips, Kent State Golden Flashes, Buffalo Bulls, Miami (Ohio) Redhawks, and Bowling Green Falcons. The annual

winners of each division meet at the end of the season in the MAC championship game with the winner going on to play in the Motor City Bowl in Detroit, Michigan. Marshall has won the MAC the last and only four years it has been in the conference. Now, they're looking to get out, to take a step up to Conference USA, which in my opinion, isn't notably better than the MAC.

Every "true" goal is still in front of us. We can still win the West Division and represent the MAC in a bowl if we win the championship game. Sure, coming into the season we wanted to beat an SEC team, start off 2 and 1 or better, and defend our home turf on all occasions, but it hasn't happened. Instead we're 0 and 3, but not necessarily looking for answers but still searching for a win to get the snowball rolling downhill.

Our next opponent, our arch-rival Miami Redhawks, the team we beat in Oxford, Ohio last season to end the infamous 21-game losing streak that hung over our heads like a dark cloud on an otherwise sunny day. We beat them 15-10 that day and rejoiced like nothing I've ever seen before. Between the tears in the eyes of the coaches and the joy of our fans who rushed their field at the end of the game, there was time to savor it all because it wasn't only a win, but it was Miami. Though not Florida-Florida State, Auburn-Alabama, Michigan-Ohio State, in our little corner of college football it is important. We knew they would be coming to our house looking for a level of revenge, but we also wanted something, too; respect from them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Coach Bill Lynch came to Muncie, Indiana as the head coach in 1995 and promptly went 7 and 4 to finish second in the MAC. The next season, he won his first championship with a team that started the season 0 and 3, yet rallied to win its final eight games to win the conference championship. Since those 15 wins in his first two seasons, he's won 11 in the following four plus years with five coming in 1997 and five in 2000. The lean years behind, 2001 was supposed to be the year that the players and coaches put it all together to re-install a sense of pride in the program. Through it all though, Coach Lynch and each one of the assistants has stayed the course. They've persevered right along side of us, trying hard not to waver from our goals that we set each year.

1. Earn a degree
2. Win a MAC Championship
3. Represent the university in a first class manner

Our coaches truly care about these goals and it is witnessed by the performance of football players on the field and in the classroom. Each year, there are a handful of players, usually more than a dozen, who attend the 3.0 student-athlete luncheon. Though often considered “jocks” more than most other athletes, the football team is always well represented in the classroom because not only do the coaches emphasize education, but the support staff does as well.

The success off the field hasn't transferred on the field though, and a 0-3 start doesn't help things at all. Following the last second loss to Northern Iowa, the rumors concerning Coach Lynch's job began to fly. Some said he needed to win seven games. Some said that a loss to a Division 1-AA team for a second straight year would definitely mark the end of his tenure (We lost to Division 1-AA Western Illinois in 2000). Many thought the undisciplined defense and error-prone offense were a direct result of coaching mistakes. Winning six games over a 36 game span was not going to cut it with the alumni or administration. At this point, many people thought we had reverted back to the team that lost 21 in a row. They thought we'd gotten worse since the previous year. But we hadn't, and we knew. That was the most important thing. We knew we were playing better football. We had outplayed two of the three teams but just came up short in the end. We had to try and ignore the bad press from the local paper as well as the school paper. We knew what we were doing wrong, and it was just a matter of fine-tuning things. We had UK beat and UNI beat as well but just didn't seal the deal. We had to learn how to finish off games. After that third loss, there were probably about 120 people on the entire campus who believed we even had a slim hope to accomplish the goals we had set forth and on the Monday before Miami, all 120 of them were sitting shoulder to shoulder in the new team meeting room in the new football training facility.

## WHAT WENT RIGHT:

Ball State cornerbacks Steve Monson and Jesse Avant gave a good account of themselves. They didn't get beat deep, and Monson knocked down two passes and Avant had one breakup.

AUBURN

30



BALL STATE

0

## WHAT WENT WRONG:

The Cardinals took a highly conservative approach on offense. The result was no points and just 92 yards of offense. Auburn secured a 24-0 lead at halftime on the way to a 30-0 victory.

Next week: Ball State (0-1, 0-0 in the MAC) will play at Kentucky at 1:30 p.m.

# Tigers paralyze Cardinals

AUBURN, Ala. — Reggie Hodges made 10 appearances on the field for Ball State University in its season-opening football game Saturday at Auburn. Considering he's the punter, his continual presence didn't bode well for the Cardinals' chances in the game.

Ball State's offense struggled mightily against the speed of the Auburn defensive players as the Cardinals suffered a 30-0 defeat in front of 82,376 fans in Jordan-Hare Stadium.

The Cardinals managed just 92 yards of total offense on 51 plays.

Their longest rush was for 8 yards by tailback Marcus Merriweather. Their longest pass completion was 7 yards by Talmadge Hill.

"We knew [Auburn] had some question marks [on offense] coming in, but we knew their defense was good," Ball State coach Bill Lynch said. "They absolutely dominated us the entire football game."

## Cardinals suffer another shutout

Continued from Page 1C

"[Our offense] was very ineffective," he said. "Football sometimes is a simple game, and they dominated the line of scrimmage."

The shutout was the fourth for the Cardinals in the past four seasons. They were blanked 76-0 last year by Kansas State, 28-0 in 1999 by Western Michigan and 38-0 in 1998 by Iowa State.

The Cardinals failed to put themselves in good position on first down. They continually faced second-and-long and third-and-long situations, allowing the Auburn defense to tee off of their offensive line.

"We played from start to finish," Auburn defensive tackle Demarco McNeil said. "Anytime you pitch a shutout, you feel good."

Ball State managed just 60 yards on 34 rushes. Senior tailback Marcus Merriweather, who gained 1,004 yards last season, was limited to just 38 on 15

carries against Auburn.

Hill was under heavy pressure just about every time he tried to pass. The sophomore completed just five of 16 passes for 32 yards.

"They pressured with just four guys," Ball State center Colin Johnson said. "You have to give them credit, they were just fast. They got around the edges and came at us up the middle. We weren't confused, but their athleticism took over."

Ball State's defense did a credible job in allowing Auburn 385 total yards, but the Cardinals failed to make several open-field tackles that resulted in extended drives or immediate touchdowns.

The first big miss came on Auburn's second possession. Tailback Ronnie Brown ran 10 yards before breaking free from Ball State safety Jade Winchell's attempted tackle. That sprung Brown for a 43-yard touchdown and a 7-0 Tiger lead with 9:50 remaining in the first quarter.

Another key missed tackle, this one by linebacker Justin Beriault at the Ball State 20-yard line, allowed Auburn tight end Robert Johnson to score on a 44-yard pass play. That gave the Tigers a 24-0 lead just 50 seconds before halftime.

**"You have to give them credit, they were just fast. They got around the edges and came at us up the middle."**

Colin Johnson  
Ball State center

Big plays cost the Cardinals throughout the game. They allowed two other pass plays of 33 and 20 yards, and Auburn punt returner Joe Walkins ripped off runbacks of 37, 20 and 27 yards.

"I was disappointed, because we're a better tackling team than that," Lynch said. "In the first half, when the speed of the game was different than our live scrimmages, we didn't get them wrapped up."

Ball State never came close to scoring. The Cardinals reached the 50-yard line twice in the first half. The first time, they punted. The second time, they lost 5 yards on a penalty on the next play. Their deepest penetration in the second half was to their 38-yard line.

# Ball State's quarterbacks didn't have a chance

39

**A**UBURN, Ala. — The quarterback position was no place to be Saturday if you were a Ball State University football player. Auburn's lightning quick defense caused so many problems for Cardinals' starter Talmadge Hill and backup Brian Conn that they couldn't be blamed if they wished they had been somewhere else.

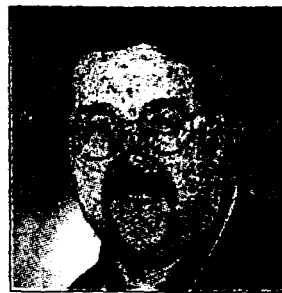
Hill was under incredible stress while being hounded by the Tigers' defense. It seemed the Auburn players knew what Hill was going to do and where he would be even before plays were sent in from the sideline.

It didn't get any better for Conn when he subbed in for Hill with 12:18 to play in the fourth quarter. The Tigers swarmed him like bees going to a hive.

"We have to have the ability to run the football, and if we don't, [Auburn's defensive players] could lay their ears back and come at us," Ball State coach Bill Lynch said. "If you can't control the line of scrimmage, there's no magic way out. . . . Everything has to be perfect, and it's not likely you'll be perfect in an opener."

Hill was sacked once and flushed from the pocket on pass plays four times. He was called for grounding one time as Auburn linebacker Dontarrious Thomas bore through the Cardinals' offensive line like a sports writer heading for a free buffet.

Hill also had two pass attempts batted back in his face,



Doug **ZALESKI**

## More Ball State coverage

■ MAC standings and game notes appear on Page 5C.

and he threw two others away to avoid being sacked. One pass was tipped at the line of scrimmage and nearly intercepted, a cornerback knocked another one down and two of his throws were well off target as he rushed to deliver the ball.

In all, Hill completed just five of 16 passes for 32 yards. It was a game he'll try to forget as soon as he can.

"You have to take into account stuff like that is going to happen and go on to the next play," Hill said.

The problem was, the next play most of the time wasn't any better than the previous one.

Conn found that out as soon as he relieved Hill.

See **BALL STATE** on Page 5C

## Ball State aware of SEC power

Continued from Page 1C

After a first-down run gained 1 yard, Conn was sacked trying to pass on second and 9. He was sacked again on the next play, a

third-and-13 dropback pass play. The hit by Auburn's Alton Moore jarred the ball loose from Conn's grasp. The Tigers recovered and converted the game's only turnover into the final points of the contest, a booming 51-yard field goal by Damon Duval.

The Cardinals were realistic after being outplayed by a quality Southeastern Conference team. They knew the strength of

their opponent, but they also knew they have to get better before playing at Kentucky, another SEC opponent, next Saturday.

Again, it will start with establishing a better running game. Without it, Hill and Conn likely will be on the run all afternoon.

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## WHAT WENT RIGHT:

Ball State discovered its offense. The Cardinals held a 427-361 edge over Kentucky in total yards. They ran 86 plays to the Wildcats' 50.

## KENTUCKY

# 28



## BALL STATE

# 20

Next week: Ball State (0-2, 0-0 in the MAC) will play host to Southern Illinois at 1 p.m.

# Big plays doom Cards

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Ball State University's silent offense came alive Saturday, a week after it failed to get untracked while being shut out in its season-opening football game.

The Cardinals accumulated 427 yards of total offense to Kentucky's 361. Ball State had a 27-17 advantage in first downs and a whopping 86-50 edge in offensive plays. Despite the improvement by the Cardinals, they couldn't find their way into the victory column.

Big plays allowed by Ball State's defense, a problem that occurred throughout the opener against Auburn, surfaced again against Kentucky. The Wildcats made the Cardinals pay for their mistakes as they rallied from two small first-half deficits to claim a 28-20 victory in front of 61,523 fans in Commonwealth Stadium. Kentucky broke a nine-game losing streak.

Kentucky averaged 7.2 yards on its 50 plays and used a big-gainer (20 yards or more) to get into the end zone or set up scores on all four of its touchdowns.

"We can't do that — that absolutely has to stop," Ball State coach Bill Lynch said. "We can't win in our conference [Mid-American] if we do that. [The problem] is not being in the right positions and not making a tackle when you are there."

See **CARDINALS** on Page 4C

## Cardinals can't hold on to leads

Continued from Page 1C

Ball State took a 3-0 lead with 50 seconds to play in the first quarter when Tom Pucke ended a 19-play, 75-yard drive with a 30-yard field goal. Then mistakes by the defense started to bog down the Cardinals.

Punter Reggie Hodges missed a tackle at the Ball State 30-yard line, allowing Kentucky's Derek Abney to run a punt back 83 yards for a touchdown. The Cardinals got a reprieve when the Wildcats were flagged for holding on the play, but it only postponed the touchdown.

Kentucky went 67 yards in 10 plays, with a 23-yard pass to tight end Derek Smith helping set up a 1-yard run by Artose Pinner.

"It was kind of a relief," Kentucky coach Guy Morriss said of the score. "I think everyone was waiting to explode. It happened, and everyone started to relax and get into a rhythm."

Ball State regained the lead for the last time when tight end Tim Streit caught a 7-yard touchdown pass from Talmadge Hill. The Cardinals' 10-7 lead late in the first half didn't last long.

Kentucky scored 50 seconds later to lead 14-10 at halftime. Shane Boyd passed 38 yards on the drive to Ernest Simms, setting up Boyd's 16-yard touchdown pass to Abney.

The Kentucky lead grew to 21-10 with 9:55 remaining in the third quarter as Chad Scott sprinted 67 yards through a flat-footed Ball State defense for a touchdown.

"It looked like the same defense [that gave up big plays against

Auburn]," Lynch said. "We played well at times, but we gave up big plays. I think we can be a very good defense, and we have a good scheme. We just have to do it game in and game out. And sometimes you have to give credit to who you're playing."

The Cardinals drew within 21-13 later in the third quarter as Pucke hit a career-long 46-yard field goal. But Kentucky got a 13-yard touchdown from Smith on a tight end screen on the first play of the fourth quarter to go up 28-13.

Ball State closed to within 28-20 with 5:26 to play as Hill hit Billy Lynch for a 3-yard touchdown pass. The Cardinals got the ball back one more time, but their chance to tie the game ended when Hill was sacked on fourth down while trying to pass from the Ball State 28-yard line.

One of the biggest improvements for Ball State came in the running game.

Tailback Marcus Merriweather rushed for 121 yards on 21 carries before leaving the game late in the third quarter with a sprained left knee.

"I felt like their defense wasn't very good, and we had some good openings," said Merriweather, who rushed for 93 yards on 12 carries in the first half. "If we got on key and made our blocks, there were good runs all day. As an offensive unit, I felt like we had something to prove this week . . . and we just wanted to pick the numbers up."

The Cardinals rushed for 257 yards. The balanced attack also included 170 yards passing as Hill completed 19 of 35 attempts. Billy Lynch caught a career-high eight balls for 60 yards.

"All week we prepared to get a victory; we didn't plan just to show up," Hill said. "We played hard. I'm not unhappy with the effort."

## BSU came out swinging against Kentucky

**L**EXINGTON, Ky. — The meek might inherit the earth, but the timid don't last long on the football field.

That's pretty much the stance Ball State University's football team took as it prepared to play a Southeastern Conference team Saturday for the second straight week.

The Cardinals opened the season Sept. 1 and got shoved around by a top-notch Auburn defense. The result for Ball State was a paltry 92 yards of total offense, a measly five first downs, and a disappointing 30-0 defeat.

Another loss Saturday against a Kentucky team that rates as one of the worst in the SEC wouldn't have been devastating for Ball State. But another ugly offensive performance would certainly have caused many of the Cardinals' fans to wonder what was going on with a team that expects to be improved from the 2000 version that had a 5-6 record.

## Ball State offense played better

Continued from Page 1C

Instead, the Cardinals came out in attack mode against Kentucky in Commonwealth Stadium. The ballet shoes were off and the work boots were on. Ball State came ready to try to establish the tone early in the game.

Ball State failed to accomplish its ultimate goal of getting a victory, falling 28-20 to the Wildcats. But at least observers in the press box, seeing Ball State play for the first time, weren't muttering. "That's the worst offense I've ever seen," like they were at Auburn.

The Cardinals let it be known from the outset that they were going to play with a different style. Tailback Marcus Merriweather burst through the line on

a 10-yard run on Ball State's first play. Quarterback Talmadge Hill romped for 15 yards on an option keeper on the next play.

With 25 yards on their first two plays, the Cardinals had made a significant improvement from a week earlier. They were already across the 50-yard line, something they failed to accomplish against Auburn, and they picked up as many yards as they had in almost an entire quarter against the Tigers.

It wasn't business as usual.

"We knew we had nothing to lose, and we had to take our shots; we couldn't be conservative," Hill said. "This is the kind of football team we are. We can be explosive."

When drives appeared to stall, the Cardinals went on the offensive. Ball State faced fourth and one on its second possession of a scoreless game. Instead of punting, Cardinals coach Bill Lynch sent in a play to try to pick up the

first down. From their own 38-yard line, no less. Hill sneaked straight ahead for 2 yards, easily getting the 18 inches he needed for the first down.

"We came here to win," Lynch said of the decision to go for the first down early in the game. "We didn't want to do anything stupid, but we all thought we could get that."

That early decision sent a message — to Kentucky, to the Cardinals' players, to the Cardinals' fans, and anybody else peering at the field from the crowd of 61,523 — that Ball State wasn't going to take a passive approach.

"I was really disappointed in our play against Auburn," Lynch

said. "We're tired of being close to these major conference teams [but not beating them]. We don't want to talk about would-haves and could-haves."

"We didn't win, and that's what we came to do," he said. "I felt we could win this game. We have to learn to play well enough to win these games."

The Cardinals didn't win, but at least they didn't go down without a fight. They learned to become more aggressive, and that can only help them the rest of the season.

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Ball State played without two starters on its offensive line and a third missed the final 17½ minutes with an injury. Despite the absences, the Cardinals racked up 506 yards of offense

42

NORTHERN IOWA

42



BALL STATE

39

Next week: Ball State (0-3) will play at home at 1 p.m. Saturday against the Miami RedHawks.

**WHAT WENT WRONG:**  
Ball State made too many mistakes to count. The offense turned the ball over, the defense failed in crucial situations, and the kicking game misfired when it could have produced a lead.

# Last-Second heartbreaker

## BSU wastes 506 yards of offense in another loss

By DOUG ZALESKI  
The Star Press

**MUNCIE** — Ball State found a way Saturday to waste one of the most productive offensive performances in school history. Yet as good as the offense was at times, it shared equal blame with the defense and kicking game in letting Northern Iowa sneak away with a 42-39 victory on a field goal on the final play of the game.

The Cardinals committed three turnovers that the Panthers turned into touchdowns, and Ball State frittered two excellent scoring opportunities in the final 18 minutes as an announced crowd of 10,787 — the smallest for a home opener in 7 years — watched at Ball State Stadium.

When plays had to be made with the score tied 39-39 down the stretch, Ball State wilted and Northern Iowa surged. The Panthers' Brent Browner blocked a 26-yard field-goal attempt by Ball State's Tom Pucke with 4:25 remaining in

### More inside

- Cardinals Insider features an in-depth look at the Ball State-Northern Iowa game and the Mid-American Conference standings. Page 4C.
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the game.

That gave Northern Iowa the ball on its 15-yard line. Redshirt freshman quarterback Tom Petrie, who was intercepted five times by Iowa State in his last game, directed an 11-play drive to set up Mackenzie Hoambrecker's 33-yard field goal to win the game as time expired.

It left the disconsolate Cardinals still searching for their first victory after starting the season 0-3 for the fourth straight season and the fifth time in the past 6 years.

## Cardinals hurt by turnovers

Continued from Page 1C

"Right now, we're very disappointed, but we have to bounce back," Ball State coach Bill Lynch said. "It's a game of plays, and [Northern Iowa] made them and we didn't take advantage of any. We got two turnovers, and we missed field goals on both occasions."

The Division I-AA Panthers (2-1) jumped on the home team's blunders.

Ball State tailback Scott Blair fumbled at his 34-yard line. Northern Iowa recovered, then scored five plays later for a 17-12 lead with 6:31 remaining in the second quarter. On the Cardinals' next possession, receiver Corey Parchman let a pass slip through his hands, and the Panthers' Ken Harris intercepted. Harris returned the ball 31 yards to the Ball State 23, and Northern Iowa scored on the next play as Petrie passed to Marius Mays for a 24-12 lead.

Ball State made an immediate rally. Blair ran 9 yards for a touchdown with 2:11 left in the half, and quarterback Talmadge Hill lofted a 10-yard scoring pass to Billy Lynch 3 seconds before the break to give Ball State a 25-24 halftime lead.

Ball State scored on its first possession of the second half as Hill ran 1 yard for the touchdown. That gave the Cardinals a

32-24 lead and some momentum.

"A couple times I thought we had a chance [to take control], and we just squandered it," Lynch said.

Ball State's lead didn't last long. Blair fumbled again at his 4-yard line, and Northern's Daryon Brutley ran the ball in for a touchdown as the Panthers tied the score early in the third quarter.

The teams traded touchdowns later in the third period, setting up the deciding fourth quarter. Northern Iowa, which has beaten the past three Mid-American Conference teams it has played, simply made more plays to pull out the victory.

"We always talk about playmakers," Panthers coach Mark Farley said. "If you're going to be a good football team, somebody has to be a difference-maker."

Browner's blocked field goal and Hoambrecker's game-winning kick nullified a 506-yard performance by Ball State's offense, 28 yards shy of the sixth-best total in school history. Blair rushed for a career-best 107 yards, but he was banished to the bench after his second fumble with 9:24 to play in the third quarter. Yorktown's Jason Teeters filled in most of the rest of the way and rushed for a career-high 79 yards.

"I felt like I responded," Teeters said. "We have a lot of talent at running back, and when we're put in that situation, we could all respond. We have confidence in each other."

# Chalk up Ball State's defeat to Panthers as total team effort

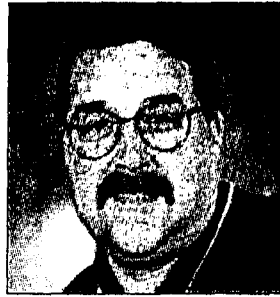
**M**UNCIE — Ball State University came into Saturday's home-opening game trying to define who it is as a football team after losing to two Southeastern Conference teams. It is still searching for answers after a 42-39 meltdown against Northern Iowa.

But this much is clear: The Cardinals can't play like they did against Northern Iowa and expect to compete at a high level in the Mid-American Conference.

Many of the team's players have talked freely this season about positioning themselves for

a chance to win the MAC West Division. They couldn't beat a Division I-AA program that would rate as a middle-of-the-pack team in the MAC, and if they couldn't beat that kind of team in a home game, they aren't ready to stand toe to toe with established championship programs such as Toledo and Western Michigan.

I'm all for having some confidence in whatever you're trying to do. You have to convince yourself that you can do something before it happens. But any overt discussion of winning the



Doug **ZALESKI**

West should be put off until later in the season, if and when that becomes a possibility. Of immediate concern to the Cardi-

nals' players should be to figure out how they can avoid some of the rag-tag play that has plagued them throughout the first three games of the season.

The stench left by Saturday's losing performance was foul, indeed. Coach Bill Lynch said there would be no finger-pointing by anybody wearing red and white, and he was dead on the mark. This was a total team effort in how to trip over your own feet, and look especially clumsy in the process.

The offense piled up 506 yards, but it gift-wrapped three touchdowns for the Panthers by

committing two fumbles and an interception.

The defense, touted as the fastest group Ball State has assembled since its 1996 MAC title team and possibly its best unit since then, too, has showed an alarming knack for giving up big plays and missing tackles. It had a chance to show its mettle with 4:25 remaining in the game. Instead, it allowed a red-shirt freshman quarterback to direct a game-winning drive that began from his team's 15-yard line.

See **BALL STATE** on Page 4C

## Ball State misses chances to win

Continued from Page 1C

The oft-maligned kicking game showed some signs of shaking its malaise early in Saturday's game. But when the Cardinals lined up for what might have been a game-winning 26-yard field goal by Tom Pucke, somebody forgot to throw a block on Northern Iowa's left end, and Ball State came up empty.

A questioner in the postgame press conference suggested that Ball State's 506-yard offensive performance behind a patchwork offensive line that is riddled with injuries was a bright spot. Lynch wasn't interested in silver linings.

"It's hard to sit here and

reflect on bright spots right now," Lynch said. "We had a football game that we had a chance to win, and we didn't win it."

So after losing to a Kentucky team that was rated as the worst in the SEC and failing to win a home game against a team it should have been able to beat, a sense of urgency is starting to build with this team. If you're looking for help, don't look at the schedule.

The Cardinals will open the MAC season at home next Saturday against Miami. Ball State already has squandered two good chances for victories. It can't afford to wait around much longer if it hopes to get something going in a positive direction this season.

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## Chapter Four

I'm beginning to appreciate the times that have gotten me here, us here, to where we are today. There's been good. There's been bad, real bad. And there has been indifferent, but together, they make up who we are and what we are. We're football players. I'm a football player, and it's hard to believe that I can only say that for a few more months. As a college student, I know that I don't reflect on my life. I don't appreciate the special things, the little things until they are gone or no longer here. I don't have a camera. I don't have pictures. All I have are words with mental pictures that tell me who I am and what I've done. The more I think about where I am today, on the team bus heading to Ypsilanti, Michigan to play the Eastern Michigan Eagles, the more it takes me back to times past.

My first road trip as a Cardinal came about as more of family courtesy than anything else. Our first game in 1997 was at Miami Ohio and as a freshman who was definitely redshirting, I didn't make the trip. Only a few freshmen did, but they were only going in case of an emergency as the coaches had decided to redshirt all the freshmen that year. The second game of my first year was against Indiana, the team my brother played for during his college career. Knowing that my family would be in attendance, Coach Lynch put me on the travel roster for the game. I was shocked and somewhat embarrassed because all the other players knew why *I* was traveling. Regardless, I was looking forward to the trip.

"Hey Lidy, make sure you ask Tex for your blue bag and don't forget to pack your stool," an upperclassman said to me the Thursday before the trip.

"Blue bag? What blue bag?"

"Just make sure you get it from Tex, alright."

"Okay."

We packed all our equipment on Thursday after practice in preparation for the trip down Friday afternoon. I was very nervous about leaving anything in the locker room so I made sure to double check the checklist. However, the checklist didn't say anything about a blue bag, but I only knew what the upperclassman had told me so, I went to our equipment manager Tex and asked, "Hey, can I get my blue bag?" With a quirky smile

and wave, he replied, "There just messing with ya, and you don't need your stool either." Boy oh boy. I had gotten it something good. All the old guys got a good laugh out of it and the rest of the freshmen knew better than to do what I did the first time they got to travel. I finished packing and left for home just twenty-four hours before the bus ride to Bloomington.

When you're a football player, you quickly learn about being on time. In fact, on time in most circles is considered about five minutes early, because we know that when a meeting is supposed to start at 8:00, it will start promptly at 8:00 not 8:03. Therefore, it's a good idea to be early to make a good impression on both the coaches and teammates because it shows that you're focused and prepared. Leaving for the road trip was no different as far as I was concerned. I went to class that Friday morning, ate lunch, and then got dressed in my travel shirt and khaki pants for the trip down. Because my truck was parked at the stadium, I had to take the shuttle out to the stadium so I made sure to leave extra early. On my way to the shuttle bus stop, a teammate, Steve Brady, saw me and offered to give me a ride. I jumped in figuring the ride would save me some time, but I didn't know he still wanted to go to Burger King before going to the stadium. To make things worse, it was close to lunch so the place was packed and traffic was fairly heavy. We finally get to the stadium with probably about a minute or two to spare. Everyone was already on the bus. We were the last two there. I felt like a complete jackass. Coach Lynch said something to us, I don't really remember what, but it was not very cordial I'm sure. When I got on the bus, the faces were rather serious looking as if to say, "This fucking freshman has the balls to make us wait. He should be the first one here." The looks weren't the worse thing about getting on the bus late, it was the lack of seats to choose from. This problem was compounded by the fact that I didn't know anybody hardly at all. I asked a fifth-year senior if I could sit by him and he reluctantly agreed. Had I known then what I know now, I'm sure I would have looked a little harder to find a younger guy to sit with, but I was so scared and just wanted to sit down.

The two-hour drive to Bloomington seemed like it took forever. I tried to talk to Troy, the guy I was sitting by, but he didn't want a whole lot to do with the rook sitting next to him. This is my first trip, I'm almost late to the bus, I don't know what to do or where to go, I feel like the guy next to me hates me, and I know I'm not going to play on

Saturday. At this point, I wish I hadn't made the trip and could have just gone down with some of my friends because that would have been a lot easier. We went straight to the stadium to have a brief practice on the Astroturf before heading to the hotel. When I stepped foot on that field, I felt at home because of all the time I had spent in that stadium as a spectator and the time I had played in there during summer camps. It was almost weird. As a kid, I had always envisioned myself wearing the cream and crimson of IU, not necessarily the red and white of BSU. Regardless, I was in the stadium that had once seemed so familiar.

That first night in the hotel was memorable for one reason: the food. The dinner we had that night was unbelievable. We had country fried steak and fried chicken with all the trimmings. Of course, watching while the seniors got their food, then the juniors, then the sophomores only made me hungrier. I couldn't tell you who I sat with or what we talked about, only that the food was amazing. I reckon that I didn't say a whole hell of a lot because of how intimidated I was just to be on the trip in the first place. I bet I ate that meal faster than any other in my entire life. After dinner we had meetings and watched a final set of film in preparation for the next day. Following meetings, roommates got to split a whole large pizza. At this point, I didn't think things could get better, but when we got the pizza, I saw that they could. I'm not sure what kind of pizza it was or where it came from, but it looked awful in the box and it didn't taste a whole lot better. I think I ate a few pieces as did my roommate and we just threw the rest away. For such a great dinner, the nighttime snack was a little bit of a letdown.

I wasn't too worried about getting a great night's sleep because the game on Saturday wasn't scheduled until 6:00 pm. Teams who have lights like to schedule early season games in the evening to keep players from keeling over in the heat and humidity. We received wakeup calls around 9:30 am or so and immediately had team breakfast. From there, we had some free time for most of the morning until going to more meetings and walkthroughs in the parking lot. We were always required to wear the same collared travel shirt with dress pants and dress shoes. This had been a requirement ever since the trip started back in Muncie 24 hours previously. One could imagine the lack of comfort we were all in out in the parking lot, on the asphalt, under the end of summer sun wearing long pants and red, collared shirts. Thankfully, walkthroughs only lasted a brief while

and then we headed for the pregame meal. It was much lighter without the heavy meats and starches like the dinner the night before. From there, we boarded the buses and headed away from the Eagle Creek Resort to the friendly (at least in my opinion) confines of Memorial Stadium on the campus of Indiana University.

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1997 was Cam Cameron's inaugural campaign as the IU head coach. Bill Mallory had been fired the fall before following a 3-8 season, his second or third consecutive losing season at that point. It is my personal opinion that the firing of Bill Mallory may have been one of the worst decisions the IU administration could ever make, especially when one considers the man who was hired. From the very start, Cam "the Sham" Cameron came in and brought with him this supposed wealth of experience from Michigan and the Washington Redskins. He was supposed to be an offensive mastermind and a magnificent recruiter. All I ever heard were negatives about the way he dealt with players and with people. His players, especially the ones recruited and loved by Coach Mallory, never felt the same way about Cam. He replaced the hard nosed, kick ass mentality of Mallory with a finesse, undisciplined style that led to many team chemistry problems as well as legal problems. My brother, Vince, for one, never appreciated his coach the way he wanted to or the way he had during his first two years at IU.

Vince was an outstanding high school football player, good enough to earn third place in the Indiana Mr. Football voting his senior year. The winner broke the single season rushing record and led his team to victory in the 4A title game and the runner-up was a three-year starter on the offensive line for Notre Dame. Vince wasn't a superb athlete, just a great player with a great knowledge for the game. I said earlier that he played linebacker at IU, but he starred as a quarterback and linebacker in high school. He led on both sides of the field and ultimately led his team to the 5A state championship during his senior season. My dad said it best following the state title game, "There may be better quarterbacks in the state and better linebackers in the state, but I'm not sure if



there is anyone who can do both better in the state.” My dad was not only a fan of his eldest son, but also his mentor and his coach.

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My father, John Lidy has been coaching football for thirty years now, all at Castle High School in Newburgh, Indiana. It's a suburban community next door to the average sized city of Evansville. In the folklore of Indiana football, Castle doesn't necessarily rank up with the likes of Penn or Indianapolis Ben Davis or Carmel or Hobart, but it does have a legacy of its own, and the name John Lidy is attached to that legacy. He began his coaching career in the early seventies at a school relatively young in existence. During his first decade of coaching, he went undefeated and then endured a losing streak that stretched the better part of two seasons. At the end of the losing streak, in 1979, he had a group of sophomore players that he new were going to be good. However, instead of bringing all the sophomores up to the varsity level in 1979, he left them together to gel on the junior varsity level. The 1979 season produced one win and that was in the last game of the season. Many people were calling for my dad's job, but he knew better and the school's administration stuck with him all the way. When 1981 rolled around, the Castle Knights were a force to be reckoned with. That sophomore class that was held back in 79 showcased what they were all about by going 8-2 during the regular season and making the playoffs. They went on to win their first two playoff games advancing to the semistate game at Carmel High School in Indianapolis. Carmel, at the time, was the defending state champion in 3A, the biggest class in Indiana. They were a powerhouse school from just north of Indy, a community of middle to upper class citizens with kids who played for the legendary Jim Belden. In mid November of 1981, the unknown Castle Knights went to Carmel High School and got beat like a bunch of unknowns 49-13. Carmel went on to win that year, but a rivalry was born.

My dad brought the Knights back the following year with a team going by the mantra of "Blue Crush." The "Blue Crush" had done just that throughout the year, dominating teams from all over Southern Indiana and winning the Southern Indiana Athletic Conference crown. They went 10-0 and steamrolled their first playoff opponent.

Then, the Knights faced their toughest test to that point, the Martinsville Artesians. The year before, en route to the semistate, Castle had defeated Martinsville narrowly at home in the Regional Championship game. In 1982, the contest would take place in Martinsville, a town about 45 minutes south of Indianapolis, well-known for its prominence of tough-ass people and former hotbed of the Ku Klux Klan.

John Lidy recalls: "I remember dressing in the gymnasium that cold Friday night and having to walk through the parking lot to get to the field. Before we left the gym, I told the kids to buckle up, put their mouthpieces in, and be prepared to hear things that they'd never heard before. I pulled aside our star receiver, Deon Chester, a black player, and told him to just try and block it all out, that he was the man and was better than all those people talking bad about him. We make it to the field amidst a storm of Martinsville fans and warm up for the game. Then, about the time the officials call for the captains for the coin flip, the entire Martinsville team comes walking out onto the field towards our sideline. Then, almost in unison, they all present us with the middle finger. It's something I'll never forget."

I was three years old in 1982, too young to go to the game, but years later, I got my hands on the film from that contest. I must say, it was one of the most climactic and emotional battles I've ever seen on tape. I also say this using only one sense, my sight, because the audio on the tape was not working, so the whole film was silent. However, just by seeing the reactions of the fans, the effort of the players, and the plays made on the field, it was incredible. The game was nip and tuck throughout, with Martinsville holding a slight edge towards the middle of the fourth quarter. They had pulled ahead 21-17 with only a few minutes left and were stuffing us every time we had the ball. We couldn't do anything and with less than two minutes left, had the ball in our own territory facing a third down and long situation. About that time, the announcer came over the loudspeaker and said, "There will be a victory celebration in the gymnasium following the game for anyone who wants to attend." They announced Martinsville as the winner. Now, I don't know if this was a ploy or something that was just a result of Artesian arrogance, but on that third down play, something magical happened.

"Slot right, 74 flea flicker"

My dad called the play and our players executed it to perfection. Mike Davis took the snap, faked the draw to right side, and fired a bullet to Deon Chester as he ran a perfect 15 yard button hook near the right sideline. As he pulled the ball into his belly, he was immediately surrounded by three Artesian tacklers, only, he didn't have the ball for very long. Dave Brosmer, playing the slot position, had delayed on the snap and circled to his right down the same sideline where Deon had caught the pass. In perfect stride and with perfect timing, Deon lateraled the ball to Brosmer who tucked it away and hit full speed at about the same time. The Martinsville players who were in the process of tackling the receiver could not change direction and Brosmer went untouched for the touchdown. I'll never forget the sight as he got to the endzone where our band was stationed and his fingers wagging like he was holding six-shooters. The old "hook and ladder" play had worked to perfection and it won us the regional championship.

Most football experts thought that win would be short lived though because the Knights would be playing host to the two-time defending state champions Carmel Greyhounds the following week. However, this time, Carmel was the team that was overmatched. The Knights were able to carry the momentum gained from the Martinsville win and totally stymie the Greyhound attack. A 21-8 victory by Castle ended Carmel's run and winning streak and set the stage for the school's first ever appearance in the state championship game.

After downing the tradition-rich Carmel Greyhounds and their well-known coach, Jim Belden, my dad faced off against another legendary coach in the 1982 3A State Championship game. His name was Don Howell and he had coached the Hobart Brickies to championships before and retired as one of the winningest coaches in Indiana High School football history. The Brickies were a powerhouse team from what is known around Indiana as "The Region," the northwest section of Indiana that encompasses the South Bend area schools as well as the Chicago-land area schools that are in Indiana. The Brickies entered the game 13-0, just like the Knights, and had a handful of players on their squad destined to play Division 1 football. On the other hand, Castle only had one or two players, both of whom were juniors, who would go on to play at the highest collegiate level. Needless to say, the storied past of the Brickies, their well-known and

highly respected coach, and their proposed talent level were supposed to be the reasons they would dominate the Knights.

The night was special for the Knights though. In 1982, the surroundings of the state championship game were different than they are now. Now, all five classes (There are now five classes—1A through 5A—instead of three.) play their state championship games in the RCA Dome in the controlled atmosphere. However, back in '82, the championship games were played at Indianapolis North Central, one of the biggest and most well equipped schools in the state. This meant that a game in late-November could be seriously hampered by wind, rain, or even snow. On that night in '82, there was some rain, and there was some wind, but nothing could stop the storm that rose from the depths of southern Indiana and announced to the state, "Hey, we play a pretty good brand of football down here, too!"

The game was back and forth throughout with neither team ever gaining much of an edge. Right before halftime though, Hobart sent its kicker out to try a 47 yard field goal in the closing seconds. The ball just crossed the bar and Hobart gained momentum at a very crucial point in the game. It wasn't long into the second half that Castle regained the all-important momentum. On about the fifty-yard line, and facing a second down and long situation, history repeated itself. Mike Davis, the quarterback, got the play from the sideline, walked into the huddle, and spoke, "Slot left, 31 Flea-Flicker," a version of the same exact play that had beaten Martinsville two weeks prior. Instead this time, the play came off of run action to the left, which required an excellent run fake and pass protection. After the playaction, Davis threw a strike to Deon Chester who had run his 15-yard curl route to perfection. In a single motion, Chester gathered the ball into his midsection, got control, and latteralled it to Dave Brosmer streaking down the Castle sideline. One Hobart defender tackled Chester as he was pitching the ball and two more slipped on the rain-soaked grass as they tried in vain to redirect after Brosmer. Number 27 was all alone on our sideline with the ball in his left arm and right hand raised with index finger extended. The game wasn't sealed until a touchdown drive late in the fourth quarter though with the key play coming on one of the most incredible catches I've ever seen in a high school game. QB Davis threw long down the far sideline towards the direction of WR Chester. Deon went up against two defenders and at about the same

time, all three players seemed to bat the ball straight up in the air. Disregarding the contact, Chester was able to keep his eye on the ball, twist his body in an effort to get underneath the ball, and then catch it for a crucial first down. It was absolutely amazing and the play seemed to rejuvenate the underdogs and take the wind out of Hobart's sails. Chris Brosmer, Dave's younger brother, scored on a tough five-yard run a few plays later and Knights went ahead to stay.

That was my dad's first state championship, but not his last.

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They were dubbed the "Blue Crush II," following their freshmen campaign in 1991, a season that saw them drub every opponent en route to an 8-0 record. As sophomores, many played at the varsity level, but most competed together on the junior varsity team, which again went undefeated. Some lessons were learned though in 1992, lessons about trusting your teammates, trusting your coaches, and working towards a single goal.

When I was in the sixth grade, my father had a heart attack. Upon inspection by the doctors, he was diagnosed with severe plaque buildup on the inner walls of four veins near his heart. He would require a quadruple bypass surgery, not an angioplasty, or some of the new, more technological methods, but major, open heart, open chest, rip spreader surgery. They were forced to take two veins from each leg to replace the damaged sections of the veins in his chest. When I saw him following the procedure, it was almost like looking at a ghost. Then, when I saw the scars for the first time, I nearly cried. A scar ran from groin to ankle on the inside of each leg and there was a huge, nightcrawler with staples on his chest. It happened in the spring of '91, and if hadn't have been for my mom, he would have died.

The day he had his heart attack, my dad was working on the roof of the house for some reason. It wasn't an overly hot day but warm. My mother was outside, too, kind of overseeing the project. At one point she recalls my dad getting very quiet and not responsive to her comments. She didn't notice anything out of the ordinary at the time and my dad, being stubborn as hell, didn't bother to say anything. That night, my mom noticed a half-empty bottle of Pepto-Bismol on the desk in the den. She confronted my

father about it and he said he just had some heartburn and wasn't feeling well. Now this, peaked my mother's interest. My dad is never sick. He never misses work for health reasons. She knew this, so she monitored him and noticed his restlessness. I'm not sure of the particulars, but at some point around bedtime, my mother began getting extremely worried. So worried in fact, that she called for an ambulance against my father's wishes. He wanted to go to bed. She wanted him to stay awake. So stubborn was my father, that when he knew that the ambulance was coming, he went out to the garage, sat on the trunk of the old T-Bird and waited for them. The doctors said that if he had gone to sleep that night, he probably wouldn't have woken up. My mom saved my dad's life that night. She is so strong and so caring, no one could ever get between her and her three boys.

There was fallout following the heart attack. People questioned if my father would ever coach again. They wondered if he would ever have the desire he once did. They wondered if the stress would be too much for him. He came back that year. However, success didn't come back with him. After outstanding seasons in '89 and '90, the post-heart attack season was somewhat of a letdown. Then, 1992 rolled around and the shit really hit the fan. After the '92 season and a 3-6 record including one of the worst playoff loses in school history, there was talk behind my dad's back that there was a push to get him out of coaching and that a group of his fellow coaches were planning on taking over the program. This rumor, combined with some other factors, resulted in my dad firing the most successful freshmen coach in school history as well as a couple of his varsity assistants. This led to an uproar with many of the juniors and seniors who had played for this particular coach and they thought it was grossly unfair, going so far as to make comments in the Evansville newspaper about how they didn't like the decision. There was some concern in Paradise, but I think John Lidy knew what he was doing.

Following an average year in 1993, a year that saw the Knights lose three games, great expectations flowed through the veins of all Castle fans as the summer of '94 came to a close. Those freshmen who had gone undefeated in '91 and done the same as sophomores in '92, had matured into a group of 20 seniors, destined to make their own mark in Castle football history. The maturation process started early for a key member of this group, my brother Vince Lidy. He was the quarterback all through high school and on defense, was the middle linebacker. He led the team on both sides of the field, but I

think he learned what teamwork, dedication, and sacrifice meant in the final game of the 1992 season. As I said earlier, that season was a letdown. My brother should have been a starter at the varsity level the whole year, but had injured his neck early in the season and was forced to play only quarterback. Because my dad had two upperclassmen who had quarterbacked for him in previous years, he thought it best to leave Vince on the JV level. That is, until the final game of the year. Vince started the playoff game against New Albany, and he found out what teammates could do. He was pummeled from pillar to post the entire game. The line left gaping holes all night for the defensive linemen to come through. By halftime, Vince was done. His chin had been split open and everyone on the field had given up on him. I didn't go to the hospital that night, but my mom did. She remembers a male nurse having to physically restrain my brother to keep him from going ape shit on everyone around. The people he trusted and wanted so badly to please had never even tried for him. I think that night, he made up his mind to never be in that position again.

1994 was supposed to be special. My dad, usually not one for boasting or pumping up a team said, and I quote, "I'm more excited about this team than any other in my 22 years of coaching." This statement came before we had even taken a competitive snap. He had reason to be excited though. He had 20 seniors, most of whom had worked their asses off during the winter and summer to get to where they were at physically. Most had attended at least one summer camp to help build camaraderie as well as get a jump start on the season. By the time we reported that fall, we had in our minds one goal: to play for and win the 5A state title in the RCA Dome.

No team with two losses had ever won the 5A state championship. No unranked team had ever won the 5A state championship. We lost two of our first three games. We lost our first two conference games following a big victory over county rival Boonville. We had gone from invincible Castle to dead last in the conference. No one, including ourselves, thought we could get beat, but get beat we did by Evansville Bosse and Evansville Central. Both teams beat us late in the game on late touchdowns. In both games, we had the opportunity to run out the clock but failed. How does a team that averages 265 pounds across the front line fail to gain ten yards in three tries? I couldn't tell you, but we found a way. Had we just been able to get one first down in each game,

we would have started 3-0 like everyone expected. Then, in week four we were inches from another loss. Only a botched PAT in overtime sealed a one point win for us. Week in and week out, we battled the team on the other sideline. Somehow, we won our last five games of the regular season and headed into the playoffs with a renewed sense of optimism. We had begun to play well, especially on defense, and the offense was beginning to show the signs of expected domination.

We headed out on the road for the first game of the playoffs against the New Albany Bulldogs. It was a good two-hour bus trip to their small stadium and because they weren't a very strong team, very few of their fans decided to show up. They jumped on us early as my brother and star tailback Tony Salpietra botched a handoff allowing them to gain possession in our territory. Their big-time back, Mandrell Peters, took off around left end on their second play from scrimmage and we didn't touch him. It was 7-0 Bulldogs early. The Knights settled down though and used their enormous size advantage to open lanes for Salpietra all night. Before the half was over, we were ahead by three touchdowns and Tony was within seventy-five yards of the single game school record. He broke off one long one in the third and after we got ahead by four touchdowns, my dad called off the dogs and took out several of the starters, including Tony. In the middle of the fourth quarter, some reporters informed Tony of his rushing totals and he asked my dad if he could go back in. My dad gave the answer most coaches would at that point, "No." We weren't going to risk losing our number one runner to injury while ahead by four touchdowns in the first round of the playoffs. There was no way, but still, following the game, the press wanted to talk more about the near miss than anything else. My dad quieted them quickly by saying, "We're here to win football games, not break records."

The second round section game started much like the first with a Castle Knight turnover that led to a field goal by the Floyd Central Crusaders. However, the lead didn't last long because on the next possession, Vince Lidy found receiver Johnny Clark streaking towards the endzone for a 7-3 lead. The offensive and defensive pressure never let up after that as the Knights would go on to lead 42-3 before emptying the bench once again, in an effort to rest the starters. Though late in the season, it was helpful for many of the players to get a little time off because so many of them played both ways. There

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were six or seven players who could be seen regularly playing on offense and defense. It is normal at most high schools for a few players to go both ways, but at a 5A school, to have over half of your starters playing both ways is almost unheard of. Still, we did it the whole year and by playoff time, most guys had adapted fairly well. After disposing of Floyd Central, we had to slip and slide our way through muck of Castle Stadium to defeat the Evansville Reitz Panthers for our first sectional crown in five years. It was a nasty night, and the score was tied at halftime, but we once again leaned on them in the second half with our big bodies. Tony continued his climb up the all-time rushing record book and was poised to make a run at Chris Brosmer's rushing mark.

The sectional championship set up an oddly familiar pattern for us if we were to continue winning. Because we hosted two sectional games in a row, it would be necessary for us to go on the road to play in the regional championship. And, like twelve years prior, we were heading to Martinsville, Indiana to face the mighty Artesians. They had the soon-to-be all-time leading passer (and future Mr. Football 1995) in the state in Earl Haniford IV. They had a 1,000 yard rusher in sophomore (and future Mr. Football 1996) Izzy Thompson. They had cowbells and air horns blaring from the time the game started until its very end. We had history. We had destiny. We had another dominating performance by our offensive line that allowed for us to run for as many yards as they threw for. Tony went for 250. Vince went for over 100. Earl threw for 300 but a majority came in the high scoring first half. We traded touchdowns the entire half and the score was tied 28-28 at the break. The second half was odd and neither team looked nearly as sharp offensively. Both teams adjusted very well and only a new wrinkle in our power running game gave us the opportunity to win the game. Usually, our "Pitch Power" play calls for the fullback to kick out the defensive end and the quarterback to lead through the hole. However, this time, our fullback went in motion which took a defender out of the box. When Vince turned to pitch the ball to Tony, he swung around to lead as usual on the play. However, instead of leading through after the fullback, Vince laid a crushing blow on the defensive end that allowed Tony to cut up and then back against the grain as the backside of the line was able to cut off pursuit. The play went left, gained the first down behind Vince's block, and then Tony's vision took over as he danced to the right side and into the endzone with about 3:00 minutes to play. We

went up by seven but with Earl over on the other sideline, we weren't guaranteed anything at all.

The "Airtesians" as they were dubbed the next day by a writer in the local paper came right back at us, gaining yards into our territory. Their fans and sideline were going nuts, fully expecting the great Earl Haniford IV to make a storybook ending. However, the other quarterback/middle linebacker and his unknown defensive end comrade had other plans in mind. There were two critical plays as the Artesians seemed prone to score. The first was a first down play designed as a screen to Izzy Thompson. The same exact play had gained forty yards early in the game when another Lidy (the one in sophomore-land) missed the tackle in the backfield. This time though, the elder Lidy was in the game, read the screen all the way, and tackle Thompson just as he hauled in the pass. That made for second and long, and it ultimately got Martinsville out of its rhythm. After two incompletions, they were facing a fourth and about fifteen on our forty when Earl dropped back to throw. The late Shawn Humm came from his defensive end spot using a spin move to wrap up the Martinsville hero and sling him to the ground. It was over. Castle 35, Martinsville 28.

Earlier, I said that history and destiny were playing a role in this playoff run and I wasn't kidding. After we defeated Martinsville, we learned that we'd get to host the semi-state playoff game the following Saturday night, and once again, history repeats itself. The mighty Carmel Greyhounds were once again slated to come to Castle Stadium and face the Knights to see who could earn the right to represent the South in the 5A State Championship Game. Jim Belden would once again bring his team down into Warrick County to see which blue and gold team would rule.

We were slated to play on a Saturday evening because it allowed Carmel and its fans the chance to make the almost four hour trip down through the cornfields of southern Indiana. Coming out of their suburban-type atmosphere around the big city of Indianapolis, this was something of a culture shock for many of the players as I was to find out a few years later while in college. Clay Walters, the quarterback for that Carmel team came to Ball State as a transfer from Purdue, and he and I talked frequently about the game at the end of the 1994 season. He said as they were coming down on the bus, they couldn't get used to all the cornfields and wheat fields that they saw. He said it was

as if they walked off the farm to step on a field to play a game. I always got a kick out of the way he told that story. Anyway, on that Saturday night in late November, the Castle Knights and Carmel Greyhounds locked horns for four grinding quarters, and at the end, both teams were in position to win the ball game.

They were ahead early and pretty much controlled the flow of the game, as their front seven was able to bottle up our running game. We hadn't faced as big and mobile a unit all season and they were giving our big linemen a lot of trouble. In fact, we nearly abandoned the run in the fourth quarter which is something completely unheard of for Castle football. John Lidy has always ran first and only thrown when necessary. Well, Carmel made it necessary. Our passing game led to a fourth quarter touchdown, but they had a defender come through untouched on the extra point for the block. With less than five minutes to play, Carmel was ahead 14-13. On their ensuing possession, they faced a couple of "possession" downs meaning that if they didn't gain enough yards for the first down, we would get the ball back. Unfortunately for us, they always managed enough yardage. With about two minutes to go, they had first down on our twenty yard line, and Clay Walters ran a bootleg out to the right side. He gained yardage down to the five but was knocked out of bounds at that point stopping the clock. That was very important because we were completely out of timeouts and could no longer stop the clock. Seemingly in an instant, our coaching staff realized the game could potentially be over if we didn't get the ball back in a hurry so the goalline unit ran onto the field with the instructions to "let them score." I'm not kidding. I was one of the players running onto the field telling everybody to let them score, and the film doesn't lie. You can see several players just stand up and back away on the snap of the ball and no one made any real effort to stop the simple "belly" play. Their big fullback scored and in an instant, their fans went crazy and our fans went completely silent. In fact, hundreds headed for the exits because Carmel was ahead 20-13 with about 1:40 to play. The extra point would turn out to be huge though at the time most thought it was inconsequential that Vince split the gap between the center and guard and forced a wide-right kick. We were only down seven and had been throwing the ball fairly well the whole game. There was still life.

What life there was seemed to be gone when Salpietra was tackled on the eleven yard line on the kickoff. The play was a microcosm of my entire game. My man made the tackle. I didn't lay a finger on him. I, personally, played rather horribly that night, so bad that I had our offensive line coach substitute our big 6 foot, 7 inch tightend Jeremy Johnson in for me in the fourth quarter. I was getting dominated by the Carmel defensive ends the whole game, and our running game to the strong side didn't have a chance if we didn't get a little more size in there. It was tough to come out, but looking back it was best for the team. It was embarrassing and I really never discussed it much, even with my father. I think he understood that I was just overmatched. Regardless, as I headed to the sideline after that kickoff, I felt as though it was my fault that we were starting so deep in our own end. I didn't even want to watch.

But then, something magical happened. Carmel got tight. First, their corner got beat on an "out and up" by our slot receiver so he grabbed him while the ball was in the air. "Pass Interference, defense. Fifteen yard penalty, automatic first down." We were moving. On the very next play, Vince faked to Salpietra off right tackle and hit Andy Southworth down the middle for a forty-yard gain. Southworth made a fingertip grab on the slightly high throw and kept his balance to gain about ten more yards after the catch. Following that play, Vince hit Johnny Clark down the left sideline on a "fade" route after Salpietra had gone underneath to draw the coverage. We had gone from our own ten to their fifteen in less than a minute. After an incompletion, Vince looked for another receiver on a "slant" route, but he too was interfered with giving us the ball on the eight-yard line. Eschewing the pass, my dad mixed things up and called for a run, the most basic or runs, but one that had served us well the entire season. Vince was our second leading rusher all season long, and a great majority of his yards came via the quarterback sneak. It was just like a fullback dive because Vince weighed 220 pounds. He wasn't your typical quarterback. On first and goal from the eight, the line surged forward, the center drove his man down, the guard block out, and Vince went into the endzone untouched. Carmel 20, Castle 19, 35 seconds to play. Go for "two" and the win, or play it safe and kick to go to overtime. As one reporter would say later, "One coach was frazzled, while the other was cool, calm, and collected."

“I-right, tight, double, Reverse 47 Pass.” That was the play call. That’s not an extra point. That’s a two-point play. We were going for the win. Vince said later, “I looked at dad as far as what we should do and he didn’t hesitate. And when your coach doesn’t hesitate, you know it’s your night.” The play called for basic run action into the right side of the line followed by “reverse” action back to the left. In the meantime, the fullback was supposed to sneak out into the flat and be the primary target while the frontside tightend (in this case, 6’7 Jeremy Johnson) was to run a route towards the back corner of the endzone. It was a play that my dad has run time and time again over his decades as a coach. In fact, a version of the same exact play went for a touchdown in the 1982 State Championship game. This time though, it just led to a state championship appearance. As Vince took the snap and faked to Salpietra, big Johnson “snuck” into the corner of the zone and as Vince whipped his head around following the reverse fake, all he had to do was make the simple toss into the big man’s breadbasket. The throw was dead on, not too hard, not too soft. Still, Johnson made it a little interesting when he juggled it slightly but as he fell to the turf, the ball was safely stowed away between his massive arms and wide body. Castle 21, Carmel 20. The aftermath of that play has lived on ever since. Anytime the old gang gets together, simply bring the word “Carmel” up or the phrase “89 Yards in 89 Seconds” is enough to start hours worth of conversation. It was memorialized on t-shirts that were sold the following week. The front of them read “Miracle in Paradise” and the back read, “89 Yards in 89 Seconds.” It was true, too. We did get the ball on the eleven yard line with 1:29 to play, thus, we went 89 yards for the score with 89 total seconds on the clock. Poetic, I guess.

To say the next week was anti-climactic is almost sad, but in a way true. Once again though, we did what we weren’t supposed to do. The Portage Indians were undefeated and rank 14<sup>th</sup> in the country by USA Today. They played like it early, but like early in the playoff run, our size and strength on offense and defense wore them down. Unlike the week before, we didn’t need to rely on our newfound passing attack. Instead, we won the championship in a fashion only a “smashmouth” football person could love. We went to our “trips tackle” formation which utilizes exactly zero wide receivers and eight offensive linemen. Usually, in a base formation, there are six linemen (tightend included) and two wide receivers with a quarterback, fullback, and tailback.

This formation was old school. We didn't even make it seem like we were going to throw the ball. We ran toss to the left, toss to the right. Quarterback keep left, quarterback keep right. It was simple, but it was beautiful. We ran for nearly 300 yards as a team and had the ball for nearly 30 minutes of the 48-minute game. It was dominating and in the end, Castle 30, Portage 12. We scored the final 23 points of the contest once settling in on the "trips tackle" formation. The Lidy family from my mom, my dad, my brother, and me felt no greater joy collectively than we did that night. It was truly something that we can and always will celebrate together. It was the last time we were ever all on the field together as well when my brother received the mental attitude award for class 5A.

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Vince went to IU in 1995 to play for Bill Mallory, not to play for the pompous ass Cam Cameron. He went there as a walk-on. He followed in the footsteps of Joe Huff, a former Castle Knight who played on the '82 championship team who had walked-on at IU and become an All-Big Ten player in 1987. In fact, when he arrived at IU, he was issued jersey number 35, Huff's old number. Vince loved the game of football and it was the same love that my father had for it and the same love the Bill Mallory had for it as well. Vince had gone to his summer camps each year during high school. He turned down the opportunity to potentially star at a small college somewhere in Podunk, USA to play for the man he so respected. It was sad to see though, that in less than 16 months as a member of the Bill Mallory family, Vince would lose his new mentor.

IU officials announced the firing of Coach Mallory before the season even ended. They announced it before the battle for the Old Oaken Bucket, the rivalry game against Purdue. They announced that IU football needed to go in a new direction, and that Coach Mallory wasn't in that directional plan. Did he quit? Simply stated: HELL NO! He kept fighting, and his players kept fighting for him. Did he quit caring? Simply stated: HELL NO! One simple story illustrates just how much he cared about his kids. At some point towards the end of the season, before the announcement of his firing had been made, Coach Mallory called Vince into his office, sat him down, and gave him a gift. He gave

Vince a full-ride scholarship from that point forward. He said that the scholarship would go into effect following the spring semester, when they became available. In his eyes, Vince had earned it, and I would say that day was probably one of the proudest days in my brother's life. That pride turned to fear a few days later. Not much more than a week had passed since Coach Mallory informed my brother of his scholarship that he was fired. Vince, needless to say, was worried. However, he didn't want to approach his coach because he knew how hard the man had to be taking it. The character of Bill Mallory though, shined through. Instead of Vince having to go to him or having to worry until the new coach came in, Mallory came to Vince. He told Vince not to worry, that he would get his scholarship and that his firing would not have any effect on that decision whatsoever. This man had just lost his job, his passion, yet he had the character, the heart, and the caring to tell a young walk-on that he had earned his stripes and that no one could take them away. Though I never played for Bill Mallory, this is the one story that will always stick in my head. When he could have been worrying about a million other things, he didn't. He worried about his boys. He loved his boys and they loved him. As a finishing touch, his boys took the field in West Lafayette, Indiana on the Saturday following Thanksgiving, 1996, and walked all over the Purdue Boilermakers to capture the Old Oaken Bucket in Coach Mallory's final game. Then, in what could be seen almost as a gesture of defiance, they lifted Coach Mallory on their shoulders and carried him off the field. He was a class man, and his boys made sure he went out with class and dignity.

I think if you ask my brother, his new coach was the antithesis of Bill Mallory. He was young. He brought a new school philosophy. He brought an air of cockiness. He was brash and very slick with the tongue but rather unslick on the sideline. We should have beat them in 1997, his first game as IU head coach and my first on the road, but we got tricked a few times. Had we played them at the end of the year, we probably would have trounced them, but they got us and kind of ran it up at the end of the game. It was a lot closer than the score indicated, but it doesn't matter now. It was the first time the Lidy brothers had been on the same field in different uniforms. Never before had we lined up against each other. Never before had my parents had to straddle a line of demarcation. In the flag football league, we were Steelers together and, in the tackle

league, Bears. Following the little league, we didn't play together again until his senior, my sophomore year of high school. We were teammates for one magical season in 1994. How I wish it could have been more. Though just a sophomore, it was my favorite season as well...



## Chapter Five

### *MAC Time*

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 120 men sat in the meeting room searching for answers. We were looking for a spark, something that would bring an end to the questions surrounding Coach Lynch's future, about our abilities as players, and about the supposedly unattainable goals which we had set before the season. Miami was next. It was time to right the ship, but how? We hadn't won. We weren't accustomed to winning. We hadn't played a complete game the entire season, and we had some key injuries to primary players. We didn't have much except each other heading into that fourth week. It's hard. Most people have no idea what it's like to be the laughing stock of the entire conference for two years then to almost turn it around and gain some respect only to lose it again because of another 0-3 start. What was worse was the lack of faith the Muncie community and Ball State community had in us as well. Faith was in short supply from outside, but faith is what all the coaches, players, and managers clung to for over two years and it was all that we had now.

I guess it was at some point during the 2000 season when Coach Lynch brought up the concept of "faith" and how it referred to us as a team. He defined "faith" as "belief without evidence," meaning that though we had lost 21 games in a row, we still had to have the belief in ourselves and each other that we had the potential to be winners. Losing, just like anything in sports, is contagious. It's like whenever we seemed to be close at the end of games, everybody would get tight. The play-calling would get tight. The defense would soften up, trying not to give up the home run play. Even the sideline would get quieter and quieter as if we were all hoping no one would screw things up. When we did finally win though, it was all lifted, and I remember well what Coach Lynch said the Monday after breaking our 21-game losing streak: "Men, we got it. We've got the evidence. Up until now, we've relied on faith, but now, we have the 'W' we needed. Now, it's no longer blind faith but rather belief." Those words were spoken nearly a year ago, at a time similar to where we are now but not quite. Once again, we're relying on faith to take us where we need to go. It's not as blind as last season because

up until our first win, we hadn't played that well. This year, we've played well, and it's just time to seal the deal with a big "W" against the Miami Redhawks.

It was a typical late September afternoon in Indiana. The sun was shining brightly, every fan was dressed in shirtsleeves as the crisp autumn air almost smelled of football. The freshly painted field shined in the mid-afternoon as the rival Redhawks made their way out of the small, cramped lockerroom in which us seniors had dressed in so long ago as freshmen. We came out as usual to the playing of the fight song and behind the cheerleaders from the southeast end of the stadium. There is nothing quite like taking the field for a college football game. There is simply no way to describe the intensity and emotion that is built up in that small corner of the endzone before we sprint underneath the "One at a Time" banner towards the home stands and our sideline. Every player seems to be jumping around, bashing helmets, "getting it up" as we say. "Get it up Red, Get it up Red, Get it up, Get it up, Get it up Red." It's awesome. Our strength coach, Wade Russell is always the first one out. He's like the crossing guard who tells us when it's time to go. To him, it's his game, too. That's what's so special about football. Even though Wade isn't into the X's and O's of the game from a coach standpoint, he still feels all the emotions that we do. That's why football is so addictive to people who get involved. There's a juice that you can't get anywhere else. There's a feeling that only the smell of the turf, the intensity of the crowd, and the imminence of conflict can create.

Though this "rivalry" game usually draws one of our largest crowds of the year, it was not so in this case. The crowd was small and quiet. I remember saying to one of my fellow backup linebackers, "Wow, not much of a turnout today." The student section was especially small. They all probably had something much more important to do on that particular Saturday at one o'clock. I mean, God only knows how important it is to sleep until the mid-afternoon because you drank too much the night before. It's not enough that the students can get in free just by showing an identification. They don't even have to pay yet they still don't come, or if they do, they generally pass out in the parking lot while tailgating. I understand that not every student will be at a game, but if you get free tickets, and there are over 15,000 of you, then why not come? It's pretty sad. However, it's also consistent. The Ball State student body has always been apathetic

towards sports teams and anything which requires student participation. Very few students actually care and it is the most noticeable when only a couple hundred students show up for football or basketball games even though they get free tickets. However, the lack of "big-time" atmosphere didn't stop us from playing the best first quarter of the year against a heavily favored opponent.

For the first time since the final game of the 1997 season, we scored two touchdowns in the first quarter of play. The first was set up by an interception by starting safety Jade Winchell and the second by a long run by our workhorse running back, Marcus Merriweather. Then, early in the second quarter, we had a chance to really put a hurting on them but we failed to score points when we got in the red zone. Miami then came back and made it 14-7 behind a strong running game and a few clutch passes. We were still in control though and had confidence but just couldn't punch the ball in the endzone. Late in the first half, they delivered what one could consider a severely taxing body blow that left us gasping for the rest of the game. On fourth down and sixteen from our forty, they went for it and gained seventeen yards on a simple curl pattern. We were in a dumbass zone coverage, one we hadn't used but a handful of times the entire season, and we screwed it up. Our cornerback, who was in charge of the deep third of the field on his side turned and ran instead of reading the route of his receiver. At the same time, the two linebackers to the same side both made their way out of proper position. One chased an under and the other dropped too far to the outside. Technically, we had two guys on the outside (the corner and outside backer) and one guy on the short inside (middle linebacker). All three were "dead wrong" as Coach Bart likes to say. Had any one of the three done their job correctly, the 15-yard curl route would have been taken away, but alas, we're Ball State. We have to give up the big play at a crucial time not make it. That first down led to a touchdown. I remember well the lockerroom at halftime.

For the first time all season, we weren't behind at the half. We were tied, yet it was the most listless, unemotional, truly beaten atmosphere I had seen in two years. We had played really well the first quarter and not too awful the second. Miami made some plays, and all we had to do was respond. But, sitting there in the quiet expanse that was our new lockerroom, the energy was gone. We were just like the crowd outside, just like we were waiting for the bad things to happen. We tried to get back up after halftime, but

it just didn't happen. We went out and got completely pushed around. Their b.s. running game split us like a hot knife through butter. Our defense, built to stop the inside and outside zone running plays got sliced and diced for around 200 yards the second half. Their tailback, who'd probably be about third or fourth on most depth charts ran for over 180 yards. We were simply terrible. Needless to say, we suffered our fourth loss of the year; and, if you thought the rumors were bad the week before, nothing had changed following the Miami game. Everywhere you went, the rumors surrounding Coach Lynch's job and the team's failures seemed to follow. The media was rather negative and those few students who still attended games were easily heard the Monday after. The funny thing was, if as many students who had opinions on the team actually went to the games, then our stadium would have been packed each week. But, that's Ball State for you.

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I guess really, up to this point, I haven't discussed much of the Ball State football philosophy. In fact, I think my mentioning of "curl routes," "zone defenses," and "inside/outside zone running plays" was the first technical BSU football-speak. What's so funny is, that it's not and never really has been important because it's never the same. When teams watch the great teams across the country, they all hang their hats on something. Whether it's Nebraska's triple option, Florida's "Fun N' Gun," or Texas A&M's "Wrecking Crew" defense, each great team has a personality that stems from its football scheme. In my five years, I think we've had ten different personalities because we've had five different offensive and five different defensive systems.

1997: Spread offense; Shotgun oriented; Power running game

4-3 Defense with a cover 4 mentality; downhill safeties designed to stop the run with heavy reliance on man-to-man coverage corners.

1998: Power running game, I-formation football; Shotgun in passing situations

4-3, cover 4 defense for first half of season; mid-season switch to a 4-4 base alignment; more or less a 4-2-5 if you ask me.

1999: Same attempt with mix of power running game and spread passing game;

Heavy emphasis on new “roll” passes and option runs

4-4, cover 5 defense (3 deep zone with a middle safety as a “robber”)

2000: New One-back offense based upon zone blocking principles.

Revamped passing attack using short, timing routes

Same 4-4 defense up front with a man-to-man coverage principle

2001: Same One-back offensive attack but even more limited;

Passing game gets less complicated as everything is predicated no turnovers

New 4-4 defense; more like a 4-3; “Eagle” front with man coverage

There, in a nutshell, the offensive and defensive principles of the Ball State Cardinals over the last five years. We never settled on anything. First, when the 4-3 was too complicated for the young guys in 1998, we quit. The coaches thought we needed to simplify because so many young guys were out there playing, but I thought it was rash. This was the same defensive scheme that ranked Ball State in the top ten in the country in the MAC Championship year of 1996. We just needed the experience just like those guys who did it before us must have needed it. That team was loaded with juniors and seniors, especially in the secondary. All eight primary linebackers, corners, and safeties were juniors or seniors. That was immensely important because those players had to be the ones to recognize formations to initiate alignment shifts and adjustments. In 1998, there was one senior corner and two junior linebackers and the rest were sophomores or freshmen. When we switched to the 4-4, it was a shot in the arm and it allowed athletes to just go play, but it was too easy to attack, and we gave up a ton of big plays. For two years, 1998 and 1999, we were extremely basic to the point where we didn't even bother with nickel or dime packages lest we get confused. Teams were spreading us out and throwing all over our “three-deep” zone coverage or they were packing it in with two tightends and running right at our undersized outside linebackers. We had no answers for anything defensively. Offensively, we were pretty basic as well, especially the two years during which the losing streak spanned. First down=run. If more than three yards are gained, then second down=run. If third down occurs, then pass. We were predictable and we couldn't execute what we wanted. What made things worse was the fact that each week, we'd change things around depending on what the other team did defensively instead of just saying, “This is who we are, stop us.” For example, against Northern

Illinois in 1999, we split our two tightends out wide because we wanted to take their cover corners out of the game. Needless to say, it was pretty much worthless. Also, our power running game was being supported by 190 pound runners for the most part. Only in 1997 and 1998 when LeAndre Moore was around did we have a true power back. After him, we had some good players, but no one who could physically carry the mail 30 times a game. It was tough. It just seemed like we couldn't decide what kind of team we wanted to be. There were times when going in, the game plan called for more runs than passes and vice versa. Then there were times when our passing game was basically a waste of time (note-we attempted 8 passes against Kansas State). Finally, in the spring of 2000, we came to a small consensus on offense.

We were going to be a one-back team which had to be balanced both run and pass. The main reason for this switch was because of the high hopes we had for Marcus Merriweather as a feature back. He was the first player we had since LeAndre in two years before that could take the physical punishment. He was about 215 pounds with good speed and with practice, gained a great knowledge at running behind the zone blocking schemes that we began to implement. The zone scheme relies on the offensive line's ability to work together as they come off the ball stepping in the same direction. Each lineman is taught to block the man who shows up in his zone, whether to the right or left. If no one shows immediately, then they're taught to go to the "next level" which means searching out linebackers. Before the snap of the ball, each lineman has an idea of who he might block, but depending on the way the defense moves and reacts, the defender in someone's zone may change. This style of running the football is becoming more and more popular and most teams now run some version of the "inside" or "outside" zone play.

This scheme is effective especially when a powerful back with good "vision" is running the ball. A running back's vision refers to his ability to find the open hole and hit it rather than just being a robot and going to a predetermined area which would have been signified by a play sheet. When running the zone plays, there is no telling where the open hole is going to be. Before he gets the ball, the running back will have an idea about potential cutback opportunities, but until the line begins its movement, he honestly doesn't know if the play is going to hit "frontside" or "backside." When the lineman